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THE MOONSTONE.

VOL. III.

THE MOONSTONE.

A Romance.

BY

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AUTHOR OF

"THE WOMAN IN WHITE," "NO NAME," "ARMADALE,"

ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE MOONSTONE.

The Narrative of Franklin Blake—(*continued*).

CHAPTER IV.

I HAVE not a word to say about my own sensations.

My impression is, that the shock inflicted on me completely suspended my thinking and feeling power. I certainly could not have known what I was about, when Betteredge joined me—for I have it on his authority that I laughed, when he asked what was the matter, and, putting the nightgown into his hands, told him to read the riddle for himself.

Of what was said between us on the beach, I have not the faintest recollection. The first place in which I can now see myself again plainly is the

plantation of firs. Betteredge and I are walking back together to the house; and Betteredge is telling me that I shall be able to face it, and he will be able to face it, when we have had a glass of grog.

The scene shifts from the plantation, to Betteredge's little sitting-room. My resolution not to enter Rachel's house is forgotten. I feel gratefully the coolness and shadiness and quiet of the room. I drink the grog (a perfectly new luxury to me, at that time of day), which my good old friend mixes with icy-cool water from the well. Under any other circumstances, the drink would simply stupefy me. As things are, it strings up my nerves. I begin to "face it," as Betteredge has predicted. And Betteredge, on his side, begins to "face it," too.

The picture which I am now presenting of myself, will, I suspect, be thought a very strange one, to say the least of it. Placed in a situation which may, I think, be described as entirely without parallel, what is the first proceeding to which I resort? Do I seclude myself from all human society? Do I set my mind to analyse the abominable impossibility which, nevertheless, confronts me as an undeniable fact? Do I hurry back to

London by the first train to consult the highest authorities, and to set a searching inquiry on foot immediately? No. I accept the shelter of a house which I had resolved never to degrade myself by entering again; and I sit, tippling spirits and water in the company of an old servant, at ten o'clock in the morning. Is this the conduct that might have been expected from a man placed in my horrible position? I can only answer, that the sight of old Betteredge's familiar face was an inexpressible comfort to me, and that the drinking of old Betteredge's grog helped me, as I believe nothing else would have helped me, in the state of complete bodily and mental prostration into which I had fallen. I can only offer this excuse for myself; and I can only admire that invariable preservation of dignity, and that strictly logical consistency of conduct which distinguish every man and woman who may read these lines, in every emergency of their lives from the cradle to the grave.

"Now, Mr. Franklin, there's one thing certain, at any rate," said Betteredge, throwing the night-gown down on the table between us, and pointing to it as if it was a living creature that could hear him. "*He's* a liar, to begin with."

This comforting view of the matter was not the view that presented itself to my mind.

"I am as innocent of all knowledge of having taken the Diamond as you are," I said. "But there is the witness against me! The paint on the nightgown, and the name on the nightgown are facts."

Betteredge lifted my glass, and put it persuasively into my hand.

"Facts?" he repeated. "Take a drop more grog, Mr. Franklin, and you'll get over the weakness of believing in facts! Foul play, sir!" he continued, dropping his voice confidentially. "That is how I read the riddle. Foul play, somewhere—and you and I must find it out. Was there nothing else in the tin case, when you put your hand into it?"

The question instantly reminded me of the letter in my pocket. I took it out, and opened it. It was a letter of many pages, closely written. I looked impatiently for the signature at the end. "Rosanna Spearman."

As I read the name, a sudden remembrance illuminated my mind, and a sudden suspicion rose out of the new light.

"Stop!" I exclaimed. "Rosanna Spearman came to my aunt out of a Reformatory? Rosanna Spearman had once been a thief?"

"There's no denying that, Mr. Franklin. What of it now, if you please?"

"What of it now? How do we know she may not have stolen the Diamond after all? How do we know she may not have smeared my nightgown purposely with the paint——?"

Betteredge laid his hand on my arm, and stopped me before I could say any more.

"You will be cleared of this, Mr. Franklin, beyond all doubt. But I hope you won't be cleared in *that* way. See what the letter says, sir. In justice to the girl's memory, see what the letter says."

I felt the earnestness with which he spoke—felt it almost as a rebuke to me. "You shall form your own judgment on her letter," I said, "I will read it out."

I began—and read these lines:

"Sir—I have something to own to you. A confession which means much misery, may sometimes be made in very few words. This confession can be made in three words. I love you."

The letter dropped from my hand. I looked at Betteredge. "In the name of Heaven," I said, "what does it mean?"

He seemed to shrink from answering the question.

"You and Limping Lucy were alone together this morning, sir," he said. "Did she say nothing about Rosanna Spearman?"

"She never even mentioned Rosanna Spearman's name."

"Please to go back to the letter, Mr. Franklin. I tell you plainly, I can't find it in my heart to distress you, after what you have had to bear already. Let her speak for herself sir. And get on with your grog. For your own sake, get on with your grog."

I resumed the reading of the letter.

"It would be very disgraceful to me to tell you this, if I was a living woman when you read it. I shall be dead and gone, sir, when you find my letter. It is that which makes me bold. Not even my grave will be left to tell of me. I may own the truth—with the quicksand waiting to hide me when the words are written.

"Besides, you will find your nightgown in my hiding-place, with the smear of the paint on it; and you will want to know how it came to be hidden by me? and why I said nothing to you about it in my life-time? I have only one reason to give. I did these strange things, because I loved you.

"I won't trouble you with much about myself, or my life, before you came to my lady's house. Lady Verinder took me out of a reformatory. I had gone to the reformatory from the prison. I

was put in the prison, because I was a thief. I was a thief, because my mother went on the streets when I was quite a little girl. My mother went on the streets, because the gentleman who was my father deserted her. There is no need to tell such a common story as this, at any length. It is told quite often enough in the newspapers.

"Lady Verinder was very kind to me, and Mr. Betteredge was very kind to me. Those two, and the matron at the reformatory are the only good people I have ever met with in all my life. I might have got on in my place—not happily—but I might have got on, if you had not come visiting. I don't blame *you*, sir. It's my fault—all my fault.

"Do you remember when you came out on us from among the sandhills, that morning, looking for Mr. Betteredge? You were like a prince in a fairy-story. You were like a lover in a dream. You were the most adorable human creature I had ever seen. Something that felt like the happy life I had never led yet, leapt up in me at the instant I set eyes on you. Don't laugh at this, if you can help it. Oh, if I could only make you feel how serious it is to *me!*

"I went back to the house, and wrote your name and mine in my work-box, and drew a true lovers' knot under them. Then, some devil—no, I ought to say some good angel—whispered to me,

'Go, and look in the glass.' The glass told me—never mind what. I was too foolish to take the warning. I went on getting fonder and fonder of you, just as if I was a lady in your own rank of life, and the most beautiful creature your eyes ever rested on. I tried—oh, dear, how I tried—to get you to look at me. If you had known how I used to cry at night with the misery and the mortification of your never taking any notice of me, you would have pitied me perhaps, and have given me a look now and then to live on.

"It would have been no very kind look, perhaps, if you had known how I hated Miss Rachel. I believe I found out you were in love with her, before you knew it yourself. She used to give you roses to wear in your button-hole. Ah, Mr. Franklin, you wore *my* roses oftener than either you or she thought! The only comfort I had at that time, was putting my rose secretly in your glass of water, in place of hers—and then throwing her rose away.

"If she had been really as pretty as you thought her, I might have borne it better. No; I believe I should have been more spiteful against her still. Suppose you put Miss Rachel into a servant's dress, and took her ornaments off——? I don't know what is the use of my writing in this way. It

can't be denied that she had a bad figure; she was too thin. But who can tell what the men like? And young ladies may behave in a manner which would cost a servant her place. It's no business of mine. I can't expect you to read my letter, if I write it in this way. But it does stir one up to hear Miss Rachel called pretty, when one knows all the time that it's her dress does it, and her confidence in herself.

"Try not to lose patience with me, sir. I will get on as fast as I can to the time which is sure to interest you—the time when the Diamond was lost.

"But there is one thing which I have got it on my mind to tell you first.

"My life was not a very hard life to bear, while I was a thief. It was only when they had taught me at the reformatory to feel my own degradation, and to try for better things, that the days grew long and weary. Thoughts of the future forced themselves on me now. I felt the dreadful reproach that honest people—even the kindest of honest people—were to me in themselves. A heart-breaking sensation of loneliness kept with me, go where I might, and do what I might, and see what persons I might. It was my duty, I know, to try and get on with my fellow-servants in my

new place. Somehow, I couldn't make friends with them. They looked (or I thought they looked) as if they suspected what I had been. I don't regret, far from it, having been roused to make the effort to be a reformed woman—but, indeed, indeed it was a weary life. You had come across it like a beam of sunshine at first—and then you too failed me. I was mad enough to love you; and I couldn't even attract your notice. There was great misery—there really was great misery in that.

"Now I am coming to what I wanted to tell you. In those days of bitterness, I went two or three times, when it was my turn to go out, to my favourite place—the beach above the Shivering Sand. And I said to myself, 'I think it will end here. When I can bear it no longer, I think it will end here.' You will understand, sir, that the place had laid a kind of spell on me before you came. I had always had a notion that something would happen to me at the quicksand. But I had never looked at it, with the thought of its being the means of my making away with myself, till the time came of which I am now writing. Then I did think that here was a place which would end all my troubles for me in a moment or two—and hide me for ever afterwards.

"This is all I have to say about myself, reckon-

ing from the morning when I first saw you, to the morning when the alarm was raised in the house that the Diamond was lost.

"I was so aggravated by the foolish talk among the women servants, all wondering who was to be suspected first; and I was so angry with you (knowing no better at that time) for the pains you took in hunting for the jewel, and sending for the police, that I kept as much as possible away by myself, until later in the day, when the officer from Frizinghall came to the house.

"Mr. Seegrave began, as you may remember, by setting a guard on the women's bedrooms; and the women all followed him up-stairs in a rage, to know what he meant by the insult he had put on them. I went with the rest, because if I had done anything different from the rest, Mr. Seegrave was the sort of man who would have suspected me directly. We found him in Miss Rachel's room. He told us he wouldn't have a lot of women there; and he pointed to the smear on the painted door, and said some of our petticoats had done the mischief, and sent us all down-stairs again.

"After leaving Miss Rachel's room, I stopped a moment on one of the landings, by myself, to see if I had got the paint-stain by any chance on *my* gown. Penelope Betteredge (the only one of the

women with whom I was on friendly terms) passed, and noticed what I was about.

"'You needn't trouble yourself, Rosanna,' she said. 'The paint on Miss Rachel's door has been dry for hours. If Mr. Seegrave hadn't set a watch on our bedrooms, I might have told him as much. I don't know what *you* think—*I* was never so insulted before in my life!'

"Penelope was a hot-tempered girl. I quieted her, and brought her back to what she had said about the paint on the door having been dry for hours.

"'How do you know that?' I asked.

"'I was with Miss Rachel, and Mr. Franklin, all yesterday morning,' Penelope said, 'mixing the colours, while they finished the door. I heard Miss Rachel ask whether the door would be dry that evening, in time for the birthday company to see it. And Mr. Franklin shook his head, and said it wouldn't be dry in less than twelve hours. It was long past luncheon-time—it was three o'clock before they had done. What does your arithmetic say, Rosanna? Mine says the door was dry by three this morning.'

"'Did some of the ladies go up-stairs yesterday evening to see it?' I asked. 'I thought I heard Miss Rachel warning them to keep clear of the door.'

"'None of the ladies made the smear,' Penelope answered. 'I left Miss Rachel in bed at twelve last night. And I noticed the door, and there was nothing wrong with it then.'

"'Oughtn't you to mention this to Mr. Seegrave, Penelope?'

"'I wouldn't say a word to help Mr. Seegrave for anything that could be offered to me!'

"She went to her work, and I went to mine.

"My work, sir, was to make your bed, and to put your room tidy. It was the happiest hour I had in the whole day. I used to kiss the pillow on which your head had rested all night. No matter who has done it since, you have never had your clothes folded as nicely as I folded them for you. Of all the little knick-knacks in your dressing-case, there wasn't one that had so much as a speck on it. You never noticed it, any more than you noticed me. I beg your pardon; I am forgetting myself. I will make haste, and go on again.

"Well, I went in that morning to do my work in your room. There was your nightgown tossed across the bed, just as you had thrown it off. I took it up to fold it—and I saw the stain of the paint from Miss Rachel's door!

"I was so startled by the discovery that I ran

out, with the nightgown in my hand, and made for the back stairs, and locked myself into my own room, to look at it in a place where nobody could intrude and interrupt me.

"As soon as I got my breath again, I called to mind my talk with Penelope, and I said to myself, 'Here's the proof that he was in Miss Rachel's sitting-room between twelve last night, and three this morning!'

"I shall not tell you in plain words what was the first suspicion that crossed my mind, when I had made that discovery. You would only be angry—and, if you were angry, you might tear my letter up and read no more of it.

"Let it be enough, if you please, to say only this. After thinking it over to the best of my ability, I made it out that the thing wasn't likely, for a reason that I will tell you. If you had been in Miss Rachel's sitting-room, at that time of night, with Miss Rachel's knowledge (and if you had been foolish enough to forget to take care of the wet door) *she* would have reminded you—*she* would never have let you carry away such a witness against her, as the witness I was looking at now! At the same time, I own I was not completely certain in my own mind that I had proved my own suspicion to be wrong. You will not have forgotten that I

have owned to hating Miss Rachel. Try to think, if you can, that there was a little of that hatred in all this. It ended in my determining to keep the nightgown, and to wait, and watch, and see what use I might make of it. At that time, please to remember, not the ghost of an idea entered my head that *you* had stolen the Diamond."

There, I broke off in the reading of the letter for the second time.

I had read those portions of the miserable woman's confession which related to myself, with unaffected surprise, and, I can honestly add, with sincere distress. I had regretted, truly regretted, the aspersion which I had thoughtlessly cast on her memory, before I had seen a line of her letter. But when I had advanced as far as the passage which is quoted above, I own I felt my mind growing bitterer and bitterer against Rosanna Spearman as I went on. "Read the rest for yourself," I said, handing the letter to Betteredge across the table. "If there is anything in it that I *must* look at, you can tell me as you go on."

"I understand you, Mr. Franklin," he answered. "It's natural, sir, in *you*. And, God help us all!" he added, in a lower tone, "it's no less natural in *her*."

I proceed to copy the continuation of the letter from the original, in my own possession :—

"Having determined to keep the nightgown, and to see what use my love, or my revenge (I hardly know which) could turn it to in the future, the next thing to discover was how to keep it without the risk of being found out.

"There was only one way—to make another nightgown exactly like it, before Saturday came, and brought the laundry-woman and her inventory to the house.

"I was afraid to put it off till next day (the Friday) ; being in doubt lest some accident might happen in the interval. I determined to make the new nightgown on that same day (the Thursday), while I could count, if I played my cards properly, on having my time to myself. The first thing to do (after locking up your nightgown in my drawer) was to go back to your bedroom—not so much to put it to rights (Penelope would have done that for me, if I had asked her) as to find out whether you had smeared off any of the paint-stain from your nightgown, on the bed, or on any piece of furniture in the room.

I examined everything narrowly, and at last, I found a few faint streaks of the paint on the inside

of your dressing-gown—not the linen dressing-gown you usually wore in that summer season, but a flannel dressing-gown which you had with you also. I suppose you felt chilly after walking to and fro in nothing but your night dress, and put on the warmest thing you could find. At any rate, there were the stains, just visible, on the inside of the dressing-gown. I easily got rid of these by scraping away the stuff of the flannel. This done, the only proof left against you was the proof locked up in my drawer.

"I had just finished your room when I was sent for to be questioned by Mr. Seegrave, along with the rest of the servants. Next came the examination of all our boxes. And then followed the most extraordinary event of the day—to *me*—since I had found the paint on your nightgown. This event came out of the second questioning of Penelope Betteredge by Superintendent Seegrave.

"Penelope returned to us quite beside herself with rage at the manner in which Mr. Seegrave had treated her. He had hinted, beyond the possibility of mistaking him, that he suspected her of being the thief. We were all equally astonished at hearing this, and we all asked, Why?

"'Because the Diamond was in Miss Rachel's sitting-room,' Penelope answered. 'And because

I was the last person in the sitting-room at night!'

"Almost before the words had left her lips, I remembered that another person had been in the sitting-room later than Penelope. That person was yourself. My head whirled round, and my thoughts were in dreadful confusion. In the midst of it all, something in my mind whispered to me that the smear on your nightgown might have a meaning entirely different to the meaning which I had given to it up to that time. 'If the last person who was in the room is the person to be suspected,' I thought to myself, 'the thief is not Penelope, but Mr. Franklin Blake!'

"In the case of any other gentleman, I believe I should have been ashamed of suspecting him of theft, almost as soon as the suspicion had passed through my mind.

"But the bare thought that you had let yourself down to my level, and that I, in possessing myself of your nightgown, had also possessed myself of the means of shielding you from being discovered, and disgraced for life—I say, sir, the bare thought of this seemed to open such a chance before me of winning your good will, that I passed blindfold, as one may say, from suspecting to believing. I made up my mind, on the spot, that you had

shown yourself the busiest of anybody in fetching the police, as a blind to deceive us all; and that the hand which had taken Miss Rachel's jewel could by no possibility be any other hand than yours."

"The excitement of this new discovery of mine must, I think, have turned my head for awhile. I felt such a devouring eagerness to see you—to try you with a word or two about the Diamond, and to *make* you look at me, and speak to me, in that way—that I put my hair tidy, and made myself as nice as I could, and went to you boldly in the library where I knew you were writing.

"You had left one of your rings up-stairs, which made as good an excuse for my intrusion as I could have desired. But, oh, sir! if you have ever loved, you will understand how it was that all my courage cooled, when I walked into the room, and found myself in your presence. And then, you looked up at me so coldly, and you thanked me for finding your ring in such an indifferent manner, that my knees trembled under me, and I felt as if I should drop on the floor at your feet. When you had thanked me, you looked back, if you remember, at your writing. I was so mortified at being treated in this way, that I plucked up spirit enough to speak. I said, 'This is a strange thing about the Diamond, sir.' And you looked up again, and

said, 'Yes, it is!' You spoke civilly (I can't deny that); but still you kept a distance—a cruel distance between us. Believing, as I did, that you had got the lost Diamond hidden about you, while you were speaking, your coolness so provoked me that I got bold enough, in the heat of the moment, to give you a hint. I said, 'They will never find the Diamond, sir, will they? No! nor the person who took it—I'll answer for that.' I nodded, and smiled at you, as much as to say, 'I know!' *This* time, you looked up at me with something like interest in your eyes; and I felt that a few more words on your side and mine might bring out the truth. Just at that moment, Mr. Betteredge spoilt it all by coming to the door. I knew his footstep, and I also knew that it was against his rules for me to be in the library at that time of day—let alone being there along with you. I had only just time to get out of my own accord, before he could come in and tell me to go. I was angry and disappointed; but I was not entirely without hope for all that. The ice, you see, was broken between us—and I thought I would take care, on the next occasion, that Mr. Betteredge was out of the way.

"When I got back to the servants' hall, the bell was going for our dinner. Afternoon already! and

the materials for making the new nightgown were still to be got! There was but one chance of getting them. I shammed ill at dinner; and so secured the whole of the interval from then till tea-time to my own use.

"What I was about, while the household believed me to be lying down in my own room; and how I spent the night, after shamming ill again at tea-time, and having been sent up to bed, there is no need to tell you. Sergeant Cuff discovered that much, if he discovered nothing more. And I can guess how. I was detected (though I kept my veil down) in the draper's shop at Frizinghall. There was a glass in front of me, at the counter where I was buying the longcloth; and—in that glass—I saw one of the shopmen point to my shoulder and whisper to another. At night again, when I was secretly at work, locked into my room, I heard the breathing of the women servants who suspected me, outside my door.

"It didn't matter then; it doesn't matter now. On the Friday morning, hours before Sergeant Cuff entered the house, there was the new nightgown—to make up your number in place of the nightgown that I had got—made, wrung out, dried, ironed, marked, and folded as the laundry woman folded all the others, safe in your drawer. There was no fear

(if the linen in the house was examined) of the newness of the nightgown betraying me. All your underclothing had been renewed, when you came to our house—I suppose on your return home from foreign parts.

"The next thing was the arrival of Sergeant Cuff; and the next great surprise was the announcement of what *he* thought about the smear on the door.

"I had believed you to be guilty (as I have owned) more because I wanted you to be guilty than for any other reason. And now, the Sergeant had come round by a totally different way to the same conclusion (respecting the nightgown) as mine! And I had got the dress that was the only proof against you! And not a living creature knew it—yourself included! I am afraid to tell you how I felt when I called these things to mind—you would hate my memory for ever afterwards."

At that place, Betteredge looked up from the letter.

"Not a glimmer of light so far, Mr. Franklin," said the old man, taking off his heavy tortoiseshell spectacles, and pushing Rosanna Spearman's confession a little away from him. "Have you come to any conclusion, sir, in your own mind, while I have been reading?"

"Finish the letter first, Betteredge; there may be something to enlighten us at the end of it. I shall have a word or two to say to you after that."

"Very good, sir. I'll just rest my eyes, and then I'll go on again. In the meantime, Mr. Franklin—I don't want to hurry you—but would you mind telling me, in one word, whether you see your way out of this dreadful mess yet?"

"I see my way back to London," I said, "to consult Mr. Bruff. If he can't help me——"

"Yes, sir?"

"And if the Sergeant won't leave his retirement at Dorking——"

"He won't, Mr. Franklin!"

"Then, Betteredge—as far as I can see now—I am at the end of my resources. After Mr. Bruff and the Sergeant, I don't know of a living creature who can be of the slightest use to me."

As the words passed my lips, some person outside knocked at the door of the room.

Betteredge looked surprised as well as annoyed by the interruption.

"Come in," he called out, irritably, "whoever you are!"

The door opened, and there entered to us, quietly, the most remarkable-looking man that I had ever seen. Judging him by his figure and his movements,

he was still young. Judging him by his face, and comparing him with Betteredge, he looked the elder of the two. His complexion was of a gipsy darkness; his fleshless cheeks had fallen into deep hollows, over which the bone projected like a penthouse. His nose presented the fine shape and modelling so often found among the ancient people of the East, so seldom visible among the newer races of the West. His forehead rose high and straight from the brow. His marks and wrinkles were innumerable. From this strange face, eyes, stranger still, of the softest brown—eyes dreamy and mournful, and deeply sunk in their orbits—looked out at you, and (in my case, at least) took your attention captive at their will. Add to this a quantity of thick closely-curling hair, which, by some freak of Nature, had lost its colour in the most startlingly partial and capricious manner. Over the top of his head it was still of the deep black which was its natural colour. Round the sides of his head—without the slightest gradation of grey to break the force of the extraordinary contrast—it had turned completely white. The line between the two colours preserved no sort of regularity. At one place, the white hair ran up into the black; at another, the black hair ran down into the white. I looked at the man with a cu-

riosity which, I am ashamed to say, I found it quite impossible to control. His soft brown eyes looked back at me gently; and he met my involuntary rudeness in staring at him, with an apology which I was conscious that I had not deserved.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I had no idea that Mr. Betteredge was engaged." He took a slip of paper from his pocket, and handed it to Betteredge. "The list for next week," he said. His eyes just rested on me again—and he left the room as quietly as he had entered it.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"Mr. Candy's assistant," said Betteredge. "By-the-bye, Mr. Franklin, you will be sorry to hear that the little doctor has never recovered that illness he caught, going home from the birthday dinner. He's pretty well in health; but he lost his memory in the fever, and he has never recovered more than the wreck of it since. The work all falls on his assistant. Not much of it now, except among the poor. *They* can't help themselves, you know. *They* must put up with the man with the piebald hair, and the gipsy complexion—or they would get no doctoring at all."

"You don't seem to like him, Betteredge?"

"Nobody likes him, sir."

"Why is he so unpopular?"

"Well, Mr. Franklin, his appearance is against him, to begin with. And then there's a story that Mr. Candy took him with a very doubtful character. Nobody knows who he is—and he hasn't a friend in the place. How can you expect one to like him, after that?"

"Quite impossible, of course! May I ask what he wanted with you, when he gave you that bit of paper?"

"Only to bring me the weekly list of the sick people about here, sir, who stand in need of a little wine. My lady always had a regular distribution of good sound port and sherry among the infirm poor; and Miss Rachel wishes the custom to be kept up. Times have changed! times have changed! I remember when Mr. Candy himself brought the list to my mistress. Now it's Mr. Candy's assistant who brings the list to me. I'll go on with the letter, if you will allow me, sir," said Betteredge, drawing Rosanna Spearman's confession back to him. "It isn't lively reading, I grant you. But, there! it keeps me from getting sour with thinking of the past." He put on his spectacles, and wagged his head gloomily. "There's a bottom of good sense, Mr. Franklin, in our conduct to our mothers, when they first start us on the journey of life. We are all of us more or less

unwilling to be brought into the world. And we are all of us right."

Mr. Candy's assistant had produced too strong an impression on me to be immediately dismissed from my thoughts. I passed over the last unanswerable utterance of the Betteredge philosophy; and returned to the subject of the man with the piebald hair.

"What is his name?" I asked.

"As ugly a name as need be," Betteredge answered, gruffly. "Ezra Jennings."

CHAPTER V.

HAVING told me the name of Mr. Candy's assistant, Betteredge appeared to think that we had wasted enough of our time on an insignificant subject. He resumed the perusal of Rosanna Spearman's letter.

On my side, I sat at the window, waiting until he had done. Little by little, the impression produced on me by Ezra Jennings—it seemed perfectly unaccountable, in such a situation as mine, that any human being should have produced an impression on me at all!—faded from my mind. My thoughts flowed back into their former channel. Once more, I forced myself to look my own incredible position resolutely in the face. Once more, I reviewed in my own mind the course which I had at last summoned composure enough to plan out for the future.

To go back to London that day; to put the

whole case before Mr. Bruff; and, last and most important, to obtain (no matter by what means or at what sacrifice) a personal interview with Rachel —this was my plan of action, so far as I was capable of forming it at the time. There was more than an hour still to spare before the train started. And there was the bare chance that Betteredge might discover something in the unread portion of Rosanna Spearman's letter, which it might be useful for me to know before I left the house in which the Diamond had been lost. For that chance I was now waiting.

The letter ended in these terms:

"You have no need to be angry, Mr. Franklin, even if I did feel some little triumph at knowing that I held all your prospects in life in my own hands. Anxieties and fears soon came back to me. With the view Sergeant Cuff took of the loss of the Diamond, he would be sure to end in examining our linen and our dresses. There was no place in my room—there was no place in the house—which I could feel satisfied would be safe from him. How to hide the nightgown so that not even the Sergeant could find it? and how to do that without losing one moment of precious time?—these were not easy questions to answer. My uncertainties ended in

my taking a way that may make you laugh. I undressed, and put the nightgown on me. You had worn it—and I had another little moment of pleasure in wearing it after you.

"The next news that reached us in the servants' hall showed that I had not made sure of the nightgown a moment too soon. Sergeant Cuff wanted to see the washing-book.

"I found it, and took it to him in my lady's sitting-room. The Sergeant and I had come across each other more than once in former days. I was certain he would know me again—and I was *not* certain of what he might do when he found me employed as servant in a house in which a valuable jewel had been lost. In this suspense, I felt it would be a relief to me to get the meeting between us over, and to know the worst of it at once.

"He looked at me as if I was a stranger, when I handed him the washing-book; and he was very specially polite in thanking me for bringing it. I thought those were both bad signs. There was no knowing what he might say of me behind my back; there was no knowing how soon I might not find myself taken in custody on suspicion, and searched. It was then time for your return from seeing Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite off by the railway; and I went to your favourite walk in the shrubbery, to try for

another chance of speaking to you—the last chance, for all I knew to the contrary, that I might have.

"You never appeared; and, what was worse still, Mr. Betteredge and Sergeant Cuff passed by the place where I was hiding—and the Sergeant saw me.

"I had no choice, after that, but to return to my proper place and my proper work, before more disasters happened to me. Just as I was going to step across the path, you came back from the railway. You were making straight for the shrubbery, when you saw me—I am certain, sir, you saw me—and you turned away as if I had got the plague, and went into the house.*

"I made the best of my way indoors again, returning by the servants' entrance. There was nobody in the laundry-room at that time; and I sat down there alone. I have told you already of the thoughts which the Shivering Sand put into my head. Those thoughts came back to me now. I wondered in myself which it would be hardest to

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* NOTE; by Franklin Blake.—The writer is entirely mistaken, poor creature. I never noticed her. My intention was certainly to have taken a turn in the shrubbery. But, remembering at the same moment that my aunt might wish to see me, after my return from the railway, I altered my mind, and went into the house.

do, if things went on in this manner—to bear Mr. Franklin Blake's indifference to me, or to jump into the quicksand and end it for ever in that way?

"It's useless to ask me to account for my own conduct, at this time. I try—and I can't understand it myself.

"Why didn't I stop you, when you avoided me in that cruel manner? Why didn't I call out, 'Mr. Franklin, I have got something to say to you; it concerns yourself, and you must, and shall, hear it?' You were at my mercy—I had got the whip-hand of you, as they say. And better than that, I had the means (if I could only make you trust me) of being useful to you in the future. Of course, I never supposed that you—a gentleman—had stolen the Diamond for the mere pleasure of stealing it. No. Penelope had heard Miss Rachel, and I had heard Mr. Betteredge, talk about your extravagance and your debts. It was plain enough to me that you had taken the Diamond to sell it, or pledge it, and so to get the money of which you stood in need. Well! I could have told you of a man in London who would have advanced a good large sum on the jewel, and who would have asked no awkward questions about it either.

"Why didn't I speak to you! why didn't I speak to you!

"I wonder whether the risks and difficulties of keeping the nightgown were as much as I could manage, without having other risks and difficulties added to them? This might have been the case with some women—but how could it be the case with me? In the days when I was a thief, I had run fifty times greater risks, and found my way out of difficulties to which *this* difficulty was mere child's play. I had been apprenticed, as you may say, to frauds and deceptions—some of them on such a grand scale, and managed so cleverly, that they became famous, and appeared in the newspapers. Was such a little thing as the keeping of the nightgown likely to weigh on my spirits, and to set my heart sinking within me, at the time when I ought to have spoken to you? What nonsense to ask the question? the thing couldn't be.

"Where is the use of my dwelling in this way on my own folly? The plain truth is plain enough, surely? Behind your back, I loved you with all my heart and soul. Before your face—there's no denying it—I was frightened of you; frightened of making you angry with me; frightened of what you might say to me (though you *had* taken the Diamond) if I presumed to tell you that I had found it out. I had gone as near to it as I dared when I spoke to you in the library. You had not turned your

back on me then. You had not started away from me as if I had got the plague. I tried to provoke myself into feeling angry with you, and to rouse up my courage in that way. No! I couldn't feel anything but the misery and the mortification of it. You're a plain girl; you have got a crooked shoulder; you're only a housemaid—what do you mean by attempting to speak to Me?" You never uttered a word of that, Mr. Franklin; but you said it all to me, nevertheless! Is such madness as this to be accounted for? No. There is nothing to be done but to confess it, and let it be.

"I ask your pardon, once more, for this wandering of my pen. There is no fear of its happening again. I am close at the end now.

"The first person who disturbed me by coming into the empty room was Penelope. She had found out my secret long since, and she had done her best to bring me to my senses—and done it kindly too.

"'Ah!' she said, 'I know why you're sitting here, and fretting, all by yourself. The best thing that can happen for your advantage, Rosanna, will be for Mr. Franklin's visit here to come to an end. It's my belief that he won't be long now before he leaves the house."

"In all my thoughts of you I had never thought of your going away. I couldn't speak to Penelope. I could only look at her.

"'I've just left Miss Rachel,' Penelope went on. 'And a hard matter I have had of it to put up with her temper. She says the house is unbearable to her with the police in it; and she's determined to speak to my lady this evening, and to go to her Aunt Ablewhite to-morrow. If she does that, Mr. Franklin will be the next to find a reason for going away, you may depend on it!'

"I recovered the use of my tongue at that. 'Do you mean to say Mr. Franklin will go with her?' I asked.

"'Only too gladly, if she would let him; but she won't. *He* has been made to feel her temper; *he* is in her black books too—and that after having done all he can to help her, poor fellow! No! no! If they don't make it up before to-morrow, you will see Miss Rachel go one way, and Mr. Franklin another. Where he may betake himself to I can't say. But he will never stay here, Rosanna, after Miss Rachel has left us.'

"I managed to master the despair I felt at the prospect of your going away. To own the truth, I saw a little a glimpse of hope for myself if there

was really a serious disagreement between Miss Rachel and you. 'Do you know,' I asked, 'what the quarrel is between them?'

"'It is all on Miss Rachel's side,' Penelope said. 'And, for anything I know to the contrary, it's all Miss Rachel's temper, and nothing else. I am loth to distress you, Rosanna; but don't run away with the notion that Mr. Franklin is ever likely to quarrel with *her*. He's a great deal too fond of her for that!'

"She had only just spoken those cruel words when there came a call to us from Mr. Betteredge. All the indoor servants were to assemble in the hall. And then we were to go in, one by one, and be questioned in Mr. Betteredge's room by Sergeant Cuff.

"It came to my turn to go in, after her ladyship's maid and the upper housemaid had been questioned first. Sergeant Cuff's inquiries—though he wrapped them up very cunningly—soon showed me that those two women (the bitterest enemies I had in the house) had made their discoveries outside my door, on the Tuesday afternoon, and again on the Thursday night. They had told the Sergeant enough to open his eyes to some part of the truth. He rightly believed me to have made a new night-gown secretly, but he wrongly believed the paint-

stained nightgown to be mine. I felt satisfied of another thing, from what he said, which it puzzled me to understand. He suspected me, of course, of being concerned in the disappearance of the Diamond. But, at the same time, he let me see—purposely, as I thought—that he did not consider me as the person chiefly answerable for the loss of the jewel. He appeared to think that I had been acting under the direction of somebody else. Who that person might be, I couldn't guess then, and can't guess now.

"In this uncertainty, one thing was plain—that Sergeant Cuff was miles away from knowing the whole truth. You were safe as long as the nightgown was safe—and not a moment longer.

"I quite despair of making you understand the distress and terror which pressed upon me now. It was impossible for me to risk wearing your nightgown any longer. I might find myself taken off, at a moment's notice, to the police court at Frizinghall, to be charged on suspicion, and searched accordingly. While Sergeant Cuff still left me free, I had to choose—and at once—between destroying the nightgown, or hiding it in some safe place, at some safe distance from the house.

"If I had only been a little less fond of you, I think I should have destroyed it. But oh! how

could I destroy the only thing I had which proved that I had saved you from discovery? If we did come to an explanation together, and if you suspected me of having some bad motive, and denied it all, how could I win upon you to trust me, unless I had the nightgown to produce? Was it wronging you to believe, as I did, and do still, that you might hesitate to let a poor girl like me be the sharer of your secret, and your accomplice in the theft which your money-troubles had tempted you to commit? Think of your cold behaviour to me, sir, and you will hardly wonder at my unwillingness to destroy the only claim on your confidence and your gratitude which it was my fortune to possess.

"I determined to hide it; and the place I fixed on was the place I knew best—the Shivering Sand.

"As soon as the questioning was over, I made the first excuse that came into my head, and got leave to go out for a breath of fresh air. I went straight to Cobb's Hole, to Mr. Yolland's cottage. His wife and daughter were the best friends I had. Don't suppose I trusted them with your secret—I have trusted nobody. All I wanted was to write this letter to you, and to have a safe opportunity of taking the nightgown off me. Suspected as I was, I could do neither of those things, with any sort of security, up at the house.

"And now I have nearly got through my long letter, writing it alone in Lucy Yolland's bedroom. When it is done, I shall go downstairs with the nightgown rolled up, and hidden under my cloak. I shall find the means I want for keeping it safe and dry in its hiding-place, among the litter of old things in Mrs. Yolland's kitchen. And then I shall go to the Shivering Sand—don't be afraid of my letting my footmarks betray me!—and hide the nightgown down in the sand, where no living creature can find it without being first let into the secret by myself.

"And, when that's done, what then?

"Then, Mr. Franklin, I shall have two reasons for making another attempt to say the words to you which I have not said yet. If you leave the house, as Penelope believes you will leave it, and if I haven't spoken to you before that, I shall lose my opportunity for ever. That is one reason. Then, again, there is the comforting knowledge—if my speaking does make you angry—that I have got the nightgown ready to plead my cause for me as nothing else can. That is my other reason. If these two together don't harden my heart against the coldness which has hitherto frozen it up (I mean the coldness of your treatment of me), there will be the end of my efforts—and the end of my life.

"Yes. If I miss my next opportunity—if you are as cruel as ever, and if I feel it again as I have felt it already—good-bye to the world which has grudged me the happiness that it gives to others. Good-bye to life, which nothing but a little kindness from *you* can ever make pleasurable to me again. Don't blame yourself, sir, if it ends in this way. But try—do try—to feel some forgiving sorrow for me! I shall take care that you find out what I have done for you, when I am past telling you of it myself. Will you say something kind of me then—in the same gentle way that you have when you speak to Miss Rachel? If you do that, and if there are such things as ghosts, I believe my ghost will hear it, and tremble with the pleasure of it.

"It's time I left off. I am making myself cry. How am I to see my way to the hiding-place if I let these useless tears come and blind me?

"Besides, why should I look at the gloomy side? Why not believe, while I can, that it will end well after all? I may find you in a good humour to-night—or, if not, I may succeed better to-morrow morning. I shan't improve my plain face by fretting—shall I? Who knows but I may have filled all these weary long pages of paper for nothing? They will go, for safety's sake (never mind now for what other reason) into the hiding-place alon

with the nightgown. It has been hard, hard work writing my letter. Oh! if we only end in understanding each other, how I shall enjoy tearing it up!

"I beg to remain, sir, your true lover and humble servant,

"ROSANNA SPEARMAN."

The reading of the letter was completed by Betteredge in silence. After carefully putting it back in the envelope, he sat thinking, with his head bowed down, and his eyes on the ground.

"Betteredge," I said, "is there any hint to guide us at the end of the letter?"

He looked up slowly, with a heavy sigh.

"There is nothing to guide you, Mr. Franklin," he answered. "If you take my advice you will keep the letter in the cover till these present anxieties of yours have come to an end. It will sorely distress you, whenever you read it. Don't read it now."

I put the letter away in my pocket-book.

A glance back at the sixteenth and seventeenth chapters of Betteredge's Narrative will show that there really was a reason for my thus sparing myself, at a time when my fortitude had been already cruelly tried. Twice over, the unhappy woman had made her last attempt to speak to me. And twice

over it had been my misfortune (God knows how innocently!) to repel the advances she had made to me. On the Friday night, as Betteredge truly describes it, she had found me alone at the billiard table. Her manner and language suggested to me—and would have suggested to any man, under the circumstances—that she was about to confess a guilty knowledge of the disappearance of the Diamond. For her own sake, I had purposely shown no special interest in what was coming; for her own sake, I had purposely looked at the billiard balls, instead of looking at *her*—and what had been the result? I had sent her away from me, wounded to the heart! On the Saturday again—on the day when she must have foreseen, after what Penelope had told her, that my departure was close at hand—the same fatality still pursued us. She had once more attempted to meet me in the shrubbery walk, and she had found me there in company with Betteredge and Sergeant Cuff. In her hearing, the Sergeant, with his own underhand object in view, had appealed to my interest in Rosanna Spearman. Again for the poor creature's own sake, I had met the police-officer with a flat denial, and declared—loudly declared, so that she might hear *me* too—that I felt "no interest whatever in Rosanna Spearman." At those words, solely designed to warn her against

attempting to gain my private ear, she had turned away and left the place: cautioned of her danger, as I then believed; self-doomed to destruction, as I know now. From that point, I have already traced the succession of events which led me to the astounding discovery at the quicksand. The retrospect is now complete. I may leave the miserable story of Rosanna Spearman—to which, even at this distance of time, I cannot revert without a pang of distress—to suggest for itself all that is here purposely left unsaid. I may pass from the suicide at the Shivering Sand, with its strange and terrible influence on my present position and future prospects, to interests which concern the living people of this narrative, and to events which were already paving my way for the slow and toilsome journey from the darkness to the light.

CHAPTER VI.

I WALKED to the railway station accompanied, it is needless to say, by Gabriel Betteredge. I had the letter in my pocket, and the nightgown safely packed in a little bag—both to be submitted, before I slept that night, to the investigation of Mr. Bruff.

We left the house in silence. For the first time in my experience of him, I found old Betteredge in my company without a word to say to me. Having something to say on my side, I opened the conversation as soon as we were clear of the lodge gates.

"Before I go to London," I began, "I have two questions to ask you. They relate to myself, and I believe they will rather surprise you."

"If they will put that poor creature's letter out of my head, Mr. Franklin, they may do anything else they like with me. Please to begin surprising me, sir, as soon as you can."

"My first question, Betteredge, is this. Was I drunk on the night of Rachel's birthday?"

"*You* drunk!" exclaimed the old man. "Why it's the great defect of your character, Mr. Franklin, that you only drink with your dinner, and never touch a drop of liquor afterwards!"

"But the birthday was a special occasion. I might have abandoned my regular habits, on that night of all others."

Betteredge considered for a moment.

"You did go out of your habits, sir," he said. "And I'll tell you how. You looked wretchedly ill—and we persuaded you to have a drop of brandy and water to cheer you up a little."

"I am not used to brandy and water. It is quite possible——"

"Wait a bit, Mr. Franklin. I knew you were not used, too. I poured you out half a wine-glass-full of our fifty year old Cognac; and (more shame for me!) I drowned that noble liquor in nigh on a tumbler-full of cold water. A child couldn't have got drunk on it—let alone a grown man!"

I knew I could depend on his memory, in a matter of this kind. It was plainly impossible that I could have been intoxicated. I passed on to the second question.

"Before I was sent abroad, Betteredge, you saw a great deal of me when I was a boy? Now tell me plainly, do you remember anything strange of me, after I had gone to bed at night? Did you ever discover me walking in my sleep?"

Betteredge stopped, looked at me for a moment, nodded his head, and walked on again.

"I see your drift now, Mr. Franklin!" he said. "You're trying to account for how you got the paint on your nightgown, without knowing it yourself. It won't do, sir. You're miles away still from getting at the truth. Walk in your sleep? You never did such a thing in your life!"

Here again, I felt that Betteredge must be right. Neither at home nor abroad had my life ever been of the solitary sort. If I had been a sleep-walker, there were hundreds on hundreds of people who must have discovered me, and who, in the interest of my own safety, would have warned me of the habit, and have taken precautions to restrain it.

Still, admitting all this, I clung—with an obstinacy which was surely natural and excusable, under the circumstances—to one or other of the only two explanations that I could see which accounted for the unendurable position in which I then stood. Observing that I was not yet satisfied, Betteredge

shrewdly adverted to certain later events in the history of the Moonstone; and scattered both my theories to the winds at once and for ever.

"Let's try it another way, sir," he said. "Keep your own opinion, and see how far it will take you towards finding out the truth. If we are to believe the nightgown—which I don't, for one—you not only smeared off the paint from the door, without knowing it, but you also took the Diamond without knowing it. Is that right, so far?"

"Quite right. Go on."

"Very good, sir. We'll say you were drunk, or walking in your sleep, when you took the jewel. That accounts for the night and morning, after the birthday. But how does it account for what has happened since that time? The Diamond has been taken to London, since that time. The Diamond has been pledged to Mr. Luker, since that time. Did you do those two things, without knowing it, too? Were you drunk when I saw you off in the pony-chaise on that Saturday evening? And did you walk in your sleep to Mr. Luker's, when the train had brought you to your journey's end? Excuse me for saying it, Mr. Franklin, but this business has so upset you, that you're not fit yet to judge for yourself. The sooner you lay your head

alongside of Mr. Bruff's head, the sooner you will see your way out of the dead-lock that has got you now."

We reached the station, with only a minute or two to spare.

I hurriedly gave Betteredge my address in London, so that he might write to me, if necessary; promising, on my side, to inform him of any news which I might have to communicate. This done, and just as I was bidding him farewell, I happened to glance towards the book-and-newspaper stall. There was Mr. Candy's remarkable-looking assistant again, speaking to the keeper of the stall! Our eyes met at the same moment. Ezra Jennings took off his hat to me. I returned the salute, and got into a carriage just as the train started. It was a relief to my mind, I suppose, to dwell on any subject which appeared to be, personally, of no sort of importance to me. At all events, I began the momentous journey back which was to take me to Mr. Bruff, wondering—absurdly enough, I admit—that I should have seen the man with the piebald hair twice in one day!

The hour at which I arrived in London precluded all hope of my finding Mr. Bruff at his place of business. I drove from the railway to his private residence at Hampstead, and disturbed the

old lawyer dozing alone in his dining-room, with his favourite pug-dog on his lap, and his bottle of wine at his elbow.

I shall best describe the effect which my story produced on the mind of Mr. Bruff by relating his proceedings when he had heard it to the end. He ordered lights, and strong tea, to be taken into his study; and he sent a message to the ladies of his family, forbidding them to disturb us on any pretence whatever. These preliminaries disposed of, he first examined the nightgown, and then devoted himself to the reading of Rosanna Spearman's letter.

The reading completed, Mr. Bruff addressed me for the first time since we had been shut up together in the seclusion of his own room.

"Franklin Blake," said the old gentleman, "this is a very serious matter, in more respects than one. In my opinion, it concerns Rachel quite as nearly as it concerns you. Her extraordinary conduct is no mystery *now*. She believes you have stolen the Diamond."

I had shrunk from reasoning my own way fairly to that revolting conclusion. But it had forced itself on me nevertheless. My resolution to obtain a personal interview with Rachel, rested really and truly on the ground just stated by Mr. Bruff.

"The first step to take in this investigation," the lawyer proceeded, "is to appeal to Rachel. She has been silent all this time, from motives which I (who know her character) can readily understand. It is impossible, after what has happened, to submit to that silence any longer. She must be persuaded to tell us, or she must be forced to tell us, on what grounds she bases her belief that you took the Moonstone. The chances are, that the whole of this case, serious as it seems now, will tumble to pieces, if we can only break through Rachel's inveterate reserve, and prevail upon her to speak out."

"That is a very comforting opinion for *me*," I said. "I own I should like to know——"

"You would like to know how I can justify it," interposed Mr. Bruff. "I can tell you in two minutes. Understand, in the first place, that I look at this matter from a lawyer's point of view. It's a question of evidence, with me. Very well. The evidence breaks down, at the outset, on one important point."

"On what point?"

"You shall hear. I admit that the mark of the name proves the nightgown to be yours. I admit that the mark of the paint proves the nightgown to have made the smear on Rachel's door. But

what evidence is there, before you or before me, to prove that you are the person who wore the nightgown?"

The objection struck me, all the more forcibly that it reflected an objection which I had felt myself.

"As to this," pursued the lawyer, taking up Rosanna Spearman's confession, "I can understand that the letter is a distressing one to *you*. I can understand that you may hesitate to analyse it from a purely impartial point of view. But *I* am not in your position. I can bring my professional experience to bear on this document, just as I should bring it to bear on any other. Without alluding to the woman's career as a thief, I will merely remark that her letter proves her to have been an adept at deception, on her own showing; and I argue from that, that I am justified in suspecting her of not having told the whole truth. I won't start any theory, at present, as to what she may or may not have done. I will only say that, if Rachel has suspected you *on the evidence of the nightgown only*, the chances are ninety-nine to a hundred that Rosanna Spearman was the person who showed it to her. In that case, there is the woman's letter, confessing that she was jealous of Rachel, confessing that she changed the roses, confessing that she saw a glimpse of hope for herself,

in the prospect of a quarrel between Rachel and you. I don't stop to ask who took the Moonstone (as a means to her end, Rosanna Spearman would have taken fifty Moonstones)—I only say that the disappearance of the jewel gave this reclaimed thief who was in love with you, an opportunity of setting you and Rachel at variance for the rest of your lives. She had not decided on destroying herself, *then*, remember; and, having the opportunity, I distinctly assert that it was in her character, and in her position at the time, to take it. What do you say to that?"

"Some such suspicion," I answered, "crossed my own mind, as soon as I opened the letter."

"Exactly! And when you had read the letter, you pitied the poor creature, and couldn't find it in your heart to suspect her. Does you credit, my dear sir—does you credit!"

"But suppose it turns out that I did wear the nightgown? What then?"

"I don't see how that fact is to be proved," said Mr. Bruff. "But assuming the proof to be possible, the vindication of your innocence would be no easy matter. We won't go into that, now. Let us wait and see whether Rachel hasn't suspected you on the evidence of the nightgown only."

"Good God, how coolly you talk of Rachel

suspecting me!" I broke out. "What right has she to suspect Me, on any evidence, of being a thief?"

"A very sensible question, my dear sir. Rather hotly put—but well worth considering for all that. What puzzles you, puzzles me too. Search your memory, and tell me this. Did anything happen while you were staying at the house—not, of course, to shake Rachel's belief in your honour—but, let us say, to shake her belief (no matter with how little reason) in your principles generally?"

I started, in ungovernable agitation, to my feet. The lawyer's question reminded me, for the first time since I had left England, that something *had* happened.

In the eighth chapter of Betteredge's Narrative, an allusion will be found to the arrival of a foreigner and a stranger at my aunt's house, who came to see me on business. The nature of his business was this.

I had been foolish enough (being, as usual, straightened for money at the time) to accept a loan from the keeper of a small restaurant in Paris, to whom I was well known as a customer. A time was settled between us for paying the money back; and when the time came, I found it (as thousands of other honest men have found it)

impossible to keep my engagement. I sent the man a bill. My name was unfortunately too well known on such documents: he failed to negociate it. His affairs had fallen into disorder, in the interval since I had borrowed of him; bankruptcy stared him in the face; and a relative of his, a French lawyer, came to England to find me, and to insist upon the payment of my debt. He was a man of violent temper; and he took the wrong way with me. High words passed on both sides; and my aunt and Rachel were unfortunately in the next room, and heard us. Lady Verinder came in, and insisted on knowing what was the matter. The Frenchman produced his credentials, and declared me to be responsible for the ruin of a poor man, who had trusted in my honour. My aunt instantly paid him the money, and sent him off. She knew me better of course than to take the Frenchman's view of the transaction. But she was shocked at my carelessness, and justly angry with me for placing myself in a position, which, but for her interference, might have become a very disgraceful one. Either her mother told her, or Rachel heard what passed—I can't say which. She took her own romantic, high-flown view of the matter. I was "heartless"; I was "dishonourable"; I had "no principle"; there was

"no knowing what I might do next"—in short, she said some of the severest things to me which I had ever heard from a young lady's lips. The breach between us lasted for the whole of the next day. The day after, I succeeded in making my peace, and thought no more of it. Had Rachel reverted to this unlucky accident, at the critical moment when my place in her estimation was again, and far more seriously, assailed? Mr. Bruff, when I had mentioned the circumstances to him, answered the question at once in the affirmative.

"It would have its effect on her mind," he said gravely. "And I wish, for your sake, the thing had not happened. However, we have discovered that there *was* a predisposing influence against you—and there is one uncertainty cleared out of our way, at any rate. I see nothing more that we can do now. Our next step in this inquiry must be the step that takes us to Rachel."

He rose, and began walking thoughtfully up and down the room. Twice, I was on the point of telling him that I had determined on seeing Rachel personally; and twice, having regard to his age and his character, I hesitated to take him by surprise at an unfavourable moment.

"The grand difficulty is," he resumed, "how to make her show her whole mind in this matter,

without reserve. Have you any suggestion to offer?"

"I have made up my mind, Mr. Bruff, to speak to Rachel myself."

"You!" He suddenly stopped in his walk, and looked at me as if he thought I had taken leave of my senses. "You, of all the people in the world!" He abruptly checked himself, and took another turn in the room. "Wait a little," he said. "In cases of this extraordinary kind, the rash way is sometimes the best way." He considered the question for a moment or two, under that new light, and ended boldly by a decision in my favour. "Nothing venture, nothing have," the old gentleman resumed. "You have a chance in your favour which I don't possess—and you shall be the first to try the experiment."

"A chance in my favour?" I repeated, in the greatest surprise.

Mr. Bruff's face softened, for the first time, into a smile.

"This is how it stands," he said. "I tell you fairly, I don't trust your discretion, and I don't trust your temper. But I do trust in Rachel's still preserving, in some remote little corner of her heart, a certain perverse weakness for *you*. Touch that—and trust to the consequences for the fullest

disclosure that can flow from a woman's lips! The question is—how are you to see her?"

"She has been a guest of yours at this house," I answered. "May I venture to suggest—if nothing was said about me beforehand—that I might see her here?"

"Cool!" said Mr. Bruff. With that one word of comment on the reply that I had made to him, he took another turn up and down the room.

"In plain English," he said, "my house is to be turned into a trap to catch Rachel; with a bait to tempt her, in the shape of an invitation from my wife and daughters. If you were anybody else but Franklin Blake, and if this matter was one atom less serious than it really is, I should refuse point-blank. As things are, I firmly believe Rachel will live to thank me for turning traitor to her in my old age. Consider me your accomplice. Rachel shall be asked to spend the day here; and you shall receive due notice of it."

"When? To-morrow?"

"To-morrow won't give us time enough to get her answer. Say the day after."

"How shall I hear from you?"

"Stay at home all the morning and expect me to call on you."

I thanked him for the inestimable assistance

which he was rendering to me with the gratitude that I really felt; and, declining a hospitable invitation to sleep that night at Hampstead, returned to my lodgings in London.

Of the day that followed, I have only to say that it was the longest day of my life. Innocent as I knew myself to be, certain as I was that the abominable imputation which rested on me must sooner or later be cleared off, there was nevertheless a sense of self-abasement in my mind which instinctively disinclined me to see any of my friends. We often hear (almost invariably, however, from superficial observers) that guilt can look like innocence. I believe it to be infinitely the truer axiom of the two that innocence can look like guilt. I caused myself to be denied all day, to every visitor who called; and I only ventured out under cover of the night.

The next morning, Mr. Bruff surprised me at the breakfast table. He handed me a large key, and announced that he felt ashamed of himself for the first time in his life.

"Is she coming?"

"She is coming to-day, to lunch and spend the afternoon with my wife and my girls."

"Are Mrs. Bruff, and your daughters, in the secret?"

"Inevitably. But women, as you may have observed, have no principles. My family don't feel my pangs of conscience. The end being to bring you and Rachel together again, my wife and daughters pass over the means employed to gain it, as composedly as if they were Jesuits."

"I am infinitely obliged to them. What is this key?"

"The key of the gate in my back-garden wall. Be there at three this afternoon. Let yourself into the garden, and make your way in by the conservatory door. Cross the small drawing-room, and open the door in front of you which leads into the music-room. There, you will find Rachel—and find her, alone."

"How can I thank you!"

"I will tell you how. Don't blame *me* for what happens afterwards."

With those words, he went out.

I had many weary hours still to wait through. To while away the time, I looked at my letters. Among them was a letter from Betteredge.

I opened it eagerly. To my surprise and disappointment, it began with an apology warning me to expect no news of any importance. In the next sentence the everlasting Ezra Jennings appeared again! He had stopped Betteredge on the way

out of the station, and had asked who I was. Informed on this point, he had mentioned having seen me to his master Mr. Candy. Mr. Candy hearing of this, had himself driven over to Betteredge, to express his regret at our having missed each other. He had a reason for wishing particularly to speak to me ; and when I was next in the neighbourhood of Frizinghall, he begged I would let him know. Apart from a few characteristic utterances of the Betteredge philosophy, this was the sum and substance of my correspondent's letter. The warm-hearted, faithful old man acknowledged that he had written "mainly for the pleasure of writing to me."

I crumpled up the letter in my pocket, and forgot it the moment after, in the all-absorbing interest of my coming interview with Rachel.

As the clock of Hampstead church struck three, I put Mr. Bruff's key into the lock of the door in the wall. When I first stepped into the garden, and while I was securing the door again on the inner side, I own to having felt a certain guilty doubtfulness about what might happen next. I looked furtively on either side of me, suspicious of the presence of some unexpected witness in some unknown corner of the garden. Nothing appeared, to justify my apprehensions. The walks were, one

and all, solitudes; and the birds and the bees were the only witnesses.

I passed through the garden; entered the conservatory; and crossed the small drawing-room. As I laid my hand on the door opposite, I heard a few plaintive chords struck on the piano in the room within. She had often idled over the instrument in this way, when I was staying at her mother's house. I was obliged to wait a little, to steady myself. The past and present rose side by side, at that supreme moment—and the contrast shook me.

After the lapse of a few moments, I roused my manhood, and opened the door.

CHAPTER VII.

AT the moment when I showed myself in the doorway, Rachel rose from the piano.

I closed the door behind me. We confronted each other in silence, with the full length of the room between us. The movement she had made in rising appeared to be the one exertion of which she was capable. All use of every other faculty, bodily or mental, seemed to be merged in the mere act of looking at me.

A fear crossed my mind that I had shown myself too suddenly. I advanced a few steps towards her. I said gently, "Rachel!"

The sound of my voice brought the life back to her limbs, and the colour to her face. She advanced, on her side, still without speaking. Slowly, as if acting under some influence independent of her own will, she came nearer and nearer to me; the

warm dusky colour flushing her cheeks, the light of reviving intelligence brightening every instant in her eyes. I forgot the object that had brought me into her presence; I forgot the vile suspicion that rested on my good name; I forgot every consideration, past, present, and future, which I was bound to remember. I saw nothing but the woman I loved coming nearer and nearer to me. She trembled; she stood irresolute. I could resist it no longer—I caught her in my arms, and covered her face with kisses.

There was a moment when I thought the kisses were returned; a moment when it seemed as if she, too, might have forgotten. Almost before the idea could shape itself in my mind, her first voluntary action made me feel that she remembered. With a cry which was like a cry of horror—with a strength which I doubt if I could have resisted if I had tried—she thrust me back from her. I saw merciless anger in her eyes; I saw merciless contempt on her lips. She looked me over, from head to foot, as she might have looked at a stranger who had insulted her.

"You coward!" she said. "You mean, miserable, heartless coward!"

Those were her first words! The most unendurable reproach that a woman can address to a

man, was the reproach that she picked out to address to Me.

"I remember the time, Rachel," I said, "when you could have told me that I had offended you in a worthier way than that. I beg your pardon."

Something of the bitterness that I felt may have communicated itself to my voice. At the first words of my reply, her eyes, which had been turned away the moment before, looked back at me unwillingly. She answered in a low tone, with a sullen submission of manner which was quite new in my experience of her.

"Perhaps there is some excuse for me," she said. "After what you have done, it seems a mean action, on your part, to find your way to me as you have found it to-day. It seems a cowardly experiment, to try an experiment on my weakness for you. It seems a cowardly surprise, to surprise me into letting you kiss me. But that is only a woman's view. I ought to have known it couldn't be your view. I should have done better if I had controlled myself, and said nothing."

The apology was more unendurable than the insult. The most degraded man living would have felt humiliated by it.

"If my honour was not in your hands," I said,

"I would leave you this instant, and never see you again. You have spoken of what I have done. What have I done?"

"What have you done! *You* ask that question of Me?"

"I ask it."

"I have kept your infamy a secret," she answered. "And I have suffered the consequences of concealing it. Have I no claim to be spared the insult of your asking me what you have done? Is *all* sense of gratitude dead in you? You were once a gentleman. You were once dear to my mother, and dearer still to me——"

Her voice failed her. She dropped into a chair, and turned her back on me, and covered her face with her hands.

I waited a little before I trusted myself to say any more. In that moment of silence, I hardly know which I felt most keenly—the sting which her contempt had planted in me, or the proud resolution which shut me out from all community with her distress.

"If you will not speak first," I said, "I must. I have come here with something serious to say to you. Will you do me the common justice of listening while I say it?"

She neither moved, nor answered. I made no

second appeal to her; I never advanced an inch nearer to her chair. With a pride which was as obstinate as her pride, I told her of my discovery at the Shivering Sand, and of all that had led to it. The narrative, of necessity, occupied some little time. From beginning to end, she never looked round at me, and she never uttered a word.

I kept my temper. My whole future depended, in all probability, on my not losing possession of myself at that moment. The time had come to put Mr. Bruff's theory to the test. In the breathless interest of trying that experiment, I moved round so as to place myself in front of her.

"I have a question to ask you," I said. "It obliges me to refer again to a painful subject. Did Rosanna Spearman show you the nightgown? Yes, or No?"

She started to her feet; and walked close up to me of her own accord. Her eyes looked me searchingly in the face, as if to read something there which they had never read yet.

"Are you mad?" she asked.

I still restrained myself. I said quietly, "Rachel, will you answer my question?"

She went on, without heeding me.

"Have you some object to gain which I don't understand? Some mean fear about the future,

in which I am concerned? They say your father's death has made you a rich man. Have you come here to compensate me for the loss of my Diamond? And have you heart enough left to feel ashamed of your errand? Is *that* the secret of your pretence of innocence, and your story about Rosanna Spearman? Is there a motive of shame at the bottom of all the falsehood, this time?"

I stopped her there. I could control myself no longer.

"You have done me an infamous wrong!" I broke out hotly. "You suspect me of stealing your Diamond. I have a right to know, and I *will* know, the reason why!"

"Suspect you!" she exclaimed, her anger rising with mine. "*You villain, I saw you take the Diamond with my own eyes!*"

The revelation which burst upon me in those words, the overthrow which they instantly accomplished of the whole view of the case on which Mr. Bruff had relied, struck me helpless. Innocent as I was, I stood before her in silence. To her eyes, to any eyes, I must have looked like a man overwhelmed by the discovery of his own guilt.

She drew back from the spectacle of my humi-

liation, and of her triumph. The sudden silence that had fallen upon me seemed to frighten her. "I spared you, at the time," she said. "I would have spared you now, if you had not forced me to speak." She moved away as if to leave the room —and hesitated before she got to the door. "Why did you come here to humiliate yourself?" she asked. "Why did you come here to humiliate me?" She went on a few steps, and paused once more. "For God's sake, say something!" she exclaimed, passionately. "If you have any mercy left, don't let me degrade myself in this way! Say something—and drive me out of the room!"

I advanced towards her, hardly conscious of what I was doing. I had possibly some confused idea of detaining her until she had told me more. From the moment when I knew that the evidence on which I stood condemned in Rachel's mind, was the evidence of her own eyes, nothing—not even my conviction of own innocence—was clear in my mind. I took her by the hand; I tried to speak firmly and to the purpose. All I could say was, "Rachel, you once loved me."

She shuddered, and looked away from me. Her hand lay powerless and trembling in mine. "Let go of it," she said faintly.

My touch seemed to have the same effect on her

which the sound of my voice had produced when I first entered the room. After she had said the word which called me a coward, after she had made the avowal which branded me as a thief—while her hand lay in mine I was her master still!

I drew her gently back into the middle of the room. I seated her by the side of me. "Rachel," I said, "I can't explain the contradiction in what I am going to tell you. I can only speak the truth as you have spoken it. You saw me—with your own eyes, you saw me take the Diamond. Before God who hears us, I declare that I now know I took it for the first time! Do you doubt me still?"

She had neither heeded nor heard me. "Let go of my hand," she repeated faintly. That was her only answer. Her head sank on my shoulder; and her hand unconsciously closed on mine, at the moment when she asked me to release it.

I refrained from pressing the question. But there my forbearance stopped. My chance of ever holding up my head again among honest men depended on my chance of inducing her to make her disclosure complete. The one hope left for me was the hope that she might have overlooked something in the chain of evidence—some mere trifle, perhaps, which might nevertheless, under careful

investigation, be made the means of vindicating my innocence in the end. I own I kept possession of her hand. I own I spoke to her with all that I could summon back of the sympathy and confidence of the bygone time.

"I want to ask you something," I said. "I want you to tell me everything that happened, from the time when we wished each other good night, to the time when you saw me take the Diamond."

She lifted her head from my shoulder, and made an effort to release her hand. "Oh, why go back to it!" she said. "Why go back to it!"

"I will tell you why, Rachel. You are the victim, and I am the victim, of some monstrous delusion which has worn the mask of truth. If we look at what happened on the night of your birthday, together, we may end in understanding each other yet."

Her head dropped back on my shoulder. The tears gathered in her eyes, and fell slowly over her cheeks. "Oh!" she said, "have *I* never had that hope? Have *I* not tried to see it, as you are trying now?"

"You have tried by yourself," I answered. "You have not tried with me to help you."

Those words seemed to awaken in her something of the hope which I felt myself when I uttered

them. She replied to my questions with more than docility—she exerted her intelligence; she willingly opened her whole mind to me.

"Let us begin," I said, "with what happened after we had wished each other good night. Did you go to bed? or did you sit up?"

"I went to bed."

"Did you notice the time? Was it late?"

"Not very. About twelve o'clock, I think."

"Did you fall asleep?"

"No. I couldn't sleep that night."

"You were restless?"

"I was thinking of you."

The answer almost unmanned me. Something in the tone, even more than in the words, went straight to my heart. It was only after pausing a little first that I was able to go on.

"Had you any light in your room?" I asked.

"None—until I got up again, and lit my candle."

"How long was that, after you had gone to bed?"

"About an hour after, I think. About one o'clock."

"Did you leave your bedroom?"

"I was going to leave it. I had put on my dressing-gown; and I was going into my sitting-room to get a book——"

"Had you opened your bedroom door?"

"I had just opened it."

"But you had not gone into the sitting-room?"

"No—I was stopped from going into it."

"What stopped you?"

"I saw a light, under the door; and I heard footsteps approaching it."

"Were you frightened?"

"Not then. I knew my poor mother was a bad sleeper; and I remembered that she had tried hard, that evening, to persuade me to let her take charge of my Diamond. She was unreasonably anxious about it, as I thought; and I fancied she was coming to me to see if I was in bed, and to speak to me about the Diamond again, if she found that I was up."

"What did you do?"

"I blew out my candle, so that she might think I was in bed. I was unreasonable, on my side—I was determined to keep my Diamond in the place of my own choosing."

"After blowing the candle out, did you go back to bed?"

"I had no time to go back. At the moment when I blew the candle out, the sitting-room door opened, and I saw—"

"You saw?"

"You."

"Dressed as usual?"

"No."

"In my nightgown?"

"In your nightgown—with your bedroom candle in your hand."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"Could you see my face?"

"Yes."

"Plainly?"

"Quite plainly. The candle in your hand showed it to me."

"Were my eyes open?"

"Yes."

"Did you notice anything strange in them? Anything like a fixed, vacant expression?"

"Nothing of the sort. Your eyes were bright—brighter than usual. You looked about in the room, as if you knew you were where you ought not to be, and as if you were afraid of being found out."

"Did you observe one thing when I came into the room—did you observe how I walked?"

"You walked as you always do. You came in as far as the middle of the room—and then you stopped and looked about you."

"What did you do, on first seeing me?"

"I could do nothing. I was petrified. I couldn't speak, I couldn't call out, I couldn't even move to shut my door."

"Could I see you, where you stood?"

"You might certainly have seen me. But you never looked towards me. It's useless to ask the question. I am sure you never saw me."

"How are you sure?"

"Would you have taken the Diamond? would you have acted as you did afterwards? would you be here now—if you had seen that I was awake and looking at you? Don't make me talk of that part of it! I want to answer you quietly. Help me to keep as calm as I can. Go on to something else."

She was right—in every way, right. I went on to other things.

"What did I do, after I had got to the middle of the room, and had stopped there?"

"You turned away, and went straight to the corner near the window—where my Indian cabinet stands."

"When I was at the cabinet, my back must have been turned towards you. How did you see what I was doing?"

"When you moved, I moved."

"So as to see what I was about with my hands?"

"There are three glasses in my sitting-room. As you stood there, I saw all that you did, reflected in one of them."

"What did you see?"

"You put your candle on the top of the cabinet. You opened, and shut, one drawer after another, until you came to the drawer in which I had put my Diamond. You looked at the open drawer for a moment. And then you put your hand in, and took the Diamond out."

"How do you know I took the Diamond out?"

"I saw your hand go into drawer. And I saw the gleam of the stone, between your finger and thumb, when you took your hand out."

"Did my hand approach the drawer again—to close it, for instance?"

"No. You had the Diamond in your right hand; and you took the candle from the top of the cabinet with your left hand."

"Did I look about me again, after that?"

"No."

"Did I leave the room immediately?"

"No. You stood quite still, for what seemed a long time. I saw your face sideways in the glass. You looked like a man thinking, and dissatisfied with his own thoughts."

"What happened next?"

"You roused yourself on a sudden, and you went straight out of the room."

"Did I close the door after me?"

"No. You passed out quickly into the passage, and left the door open."

"And then?"

"Then, your light disappeared, and the sound of your steps died away, and I was left alone in the dark."

"Did nothing happen—from that time, to the time when the whole house knew that the Diamond was lost?"

"Nothing."

"Are you sure of that? Might you not have been asleep a part of the time?"

"I never slept. I never went back to my bed. Nothing happened until Penelope came in, at the usual time in the morning."

I dropped her hand, and rose, and took a turn in the room. Every question that I could put had been answered. Every detail that I could desire to know had been placed before me. I had even reverted to the idea of sleep-walking, and the idea of intoxication; and, again, the worthlessness of the one theory and the other had been proved—on the authority, this time, of the witness who had seen me. What was to be said next? what was to be

done next? There rose the horrible fact of the Theft—the one visible, tangible object that confronted me, in the midst of the impenetrable darkness which enveloped all besides! Not a glimpse of light to guide me, when I had possessed myself of Rosanna Spearman's secret at the Shivering Sand. And not a glimpse of light now, when I had appealed to Rachel herself, and had heard the hateful story of the night from her own lips.

She was the first, this time, to break the silence.

"Well?" she said, "you have asked, and I have answered. You have made me hope something from all this, because *you* hoped something from it. What have you to say now?"

The tone in which she spoke warned me that my influence over her was a lost influence once more.

"We were to look at what happened on my birthday night, together," she went on; "and we were then to understand each other. Have we done that?"

She waited pitilessly for my reply. In answering her I committed a fatal error—I let the exasperating helplessness of my situation get the better of my self-control. Rashly and uselessly, I reproached her for the silence which had kept me until that moment in ignorance of the truth.

"If you had spoken when you ought to have

spoken," I began: "if you had done me the common justice to explain yourself ——"

She broke in on me with a cry of fury. The few words I had said seemed to have lashed her on the instant into a frenzy of rage.

"Explain myself!" she repeated. "Oh! is there another man like this in the world? I spare him, when my heart is breaking; I screen him when my own character is at stake; and *he*—of all human beings, *he*—turns on me now, and tells me that I ought to have explained myself! After believing in him as I did, after loving him as I did, after thinking of him by day, and dreaming of him by night—he wonders I didn't charge him with his disgrace the first time we met: 'My heart's darling, you are a Thief! My hero whom I love and honour, you have crept into my room under cover of the night, and stolen my Diamond!' That is what I ought to have said. You villain, you mean, mean, mean villain, I would have lost fifty Diamonds, rather than see your face lying to me, as I see it lying now!"

I took up my hat. In mercy to *her*—yes! I can honestly say it—in mercy to *her*, I turned away without a word, and opened the door by which I had entered the room.

She followed, and snatched the door out of my

hand; she closed it, and pointed back to the place that I had left.

"No!" she said. "Not yet! It seems that *I* owe a justification of my conduct to *you*. You shall stay and hear it. Or you shall stoop to the lowest infamy of all, and force your way out."

It wrung my heart to see her; it wrung my heart to hear her. I answered by a sign—it was all I could do—that I submitted myself to her will.

The crimson flush of anger began to fade out of her face, as I went back, and took my chair in silence. She waited a little, and steadied herself. When she went on, but one sign of feeling was discernable in her. She spoke without looking at me. Her hands were fast clasped in her lap, and her eyes were fixed on the ground.

"I ought to have done you the common justice to explain myself," she said, repeating my own words. "You shall see whether I did try to do you justice, or not. I told you just now that I never slept, and never returned to my bed, after you had left my sitting-room. It's useless to trouble you by dwelling on what I thought—you would not understand my thoughts—I will only tell you what I did, when time enough had passed to help me to recover myself. I refrained from alarming the house, and telling everybody what had

happened—as I ought to have done. In spite of what I had seen, I was fond enough of you to believe—no matter what!—any impossibility, rather than admit it to my own mind that you were deliberately a thief. I thought and thought—and I ended in writing to you."

"I never received the letter."

"I know you never received it. Wait a little, and you shall hear why. My letter would have told you nothing openly. It would not have ruined you for life, if it had fallen into some other person's hands. It would only have said—in a manner which you yourself could not possibly have mistaken—that I had reason to know you were in debt, and that it was in my experience and in my mother's experience of you, that you were not very discreet, or very scrupulous about how you got money when you wanted it. You would have remembered the visit of the French lawyer, and you would have known what I referred to. If you had read on with some interest after that, you would have come to an offer I had to make to you—the offer, privately (not a word, mind, to be said openly about it between us!), of the loan of as large a sum of money as I could get.—And I would have got it!" she exclaimed, her colour beginning to rise again, and her eyes looking up at me once more.

"I would have pledged the Diamond myself, if I could have got the money in no other way! In those words I wrote to you. Wait! I did more than that. I arranged with Penelope to give you the letter when nobody was near. I planned to shut myself into my bedroom, and to have the sitting-room left open and empty all the morning. And I hoped—with all my heart and soul I hoped!—that you would take the opportunity, and put the Diamond back secretly in the drawer."

I attempted to speak. She lifted her hand impatiently, and stopped me. In the rapid alternations of her temper, her anger was beginning to rise again. She got up from her chair, and approached me.

"I know what you are going to say," she went on. "You are going to remind me again that you never received my letter. I can tell you why. I tore it up."

"For what reason?" I asked.

"For the best of reasons. I prefered tearing it up to throwing it away upon such a man as you! What was the first news that reached me in the morning? Just as my little plan was complete, what did I hear? I heard that you—you!!!—were the foremost person in the house in fetching the police. You were the active man; you were the

leader; you were working harder than any of them to recover the jewel! You even carried your audacity far enough to ask to speak to *me* about the loss of the Diamond—the Diamond which you yourself had stolen; the Diamond which was all the time in your own hands! After that proof of your horrible falseness and cunning, I tore up my letter. But even then—even when I was maddened by the searching and questioning of the policeman, whom *you* had sent in—even then, there was some infatuation in my mind which wouldn't let me give you up. I said to myself, 'He has played his vile farce before everybody else in the house. Let me try if he can play it before Me.' Somebody told me you were on the terrace. I went down to the terrace. I forced myself to look at you; I forced myself to speak to you. Have you forgotten what I said?"

I might have answered that I remembered every word of it. But what purpose, at that moment, would the answer have served?

How could I tell her that what she had said had astonished me, had distressed me, had suggested to me that she was in a state of dangerous nervous excitement, had even roused a moment's doubt in my mind whether the loss of the jewel was as much a mystery to her as to the rest of us—but

had never once given me so much as a glimpse at the truth? Without the shadow of a proof to produce in vindication of my innocence, how could I persuade her that I knew no more than the veriest stranger could have known of what was really in her thoughts when she spoke to me on the terrace?

"It may suit your convenience to forget; it suits my convenience to remember," she went on. "I know what I said—for I considered it with myself, before I said it. I gave you one opportunity after another of owning the truth. I left nothing unsaid that I *could* say—short of actually telling you that I knew you had committed the theft. And all the return you made, was to look at me with your vile pretence of astonishment, and your false face of innocence—just as you have looked at me to-day; just as you are looking at me now! I left you, that morning, knowing you at last for what you were—for what you are—as base a wretch as ever walked the earth!"

"If you had spoken out at the time, you might have left me, Rachel, knowing that you had cruelly wronged an innocent man."

"If I had spoken out before other people," she retorted, with another burst of indignation, "you would have been disgraced for life! If I had spo-

ken out to no ears but yours, you would have denied it, as you are denying it now! Do you think I should have believed you? Would a man hesitate at a lie, who had done what I saw *you* do —who had behaved about it afterwards, as I saw *you* behave? I tell you again, I shrank from the horror of hearing you lie, after the horror of seeing you thieve. You talk as if this was a misunderstanding which a few words might have set right! Well! the misunderstanding is at an end. Is the thing set right? No! the thing is just where it was. I don't believe you *now!* I don't believe you found the nightgown, I don't believe in Rosanna Spearman's letter, I don't believe a word you have said. You stole it—I saw you! You affected to help the police—I saw you! You pledged the Diamond to the money-lender in London—I am sure of it! You cast the suspicion of your disgrace (thanks to my base silence!) on an innocent man! You fled to the Continent with your plunder the next morning! After all that vileness, there was but one thing more you *could* do. You could come here, with a last falsehood on your lips—you could come here, and tell me that I have wronged you!"

If I had stayed a moment more, I know not what words might have escaped me which I should have remembered with vain repentance and regret.

I passed by her, and opened the door for the second time. For the second time—with the frantic perversity of a roused woman—she caught me by the arm, and barred my way out.

"Let me go, Rachel," I said. "It will be better for both of us. Let me go."

The hysterical passion swelled in her bosom—her quickened convulsive breathing almost beat on my face, as she held me back at the door.

"Why did you come here?" she persisted, desperately. "I ask you again—why did you come here? Are you afraid I shall expose you? Now you are a rich man, now you have got a place in the world, now you may marry the best lady in the land—are you afraid I shall say the words which I have never said yet to anybody but you? I can't say the words! I can't expose you! I am worse, if worse can be, than you are yourself." Sobs and tears burst from her. She struggled with them fiercely; she held me more and more firmly. "I can't tear you out of my heart," she said, "even now! You may trust in the shameful, shameful weakness which can only struggle against you in this way!" She suddenly let go of me—she threw up her hands, and wrung them frantically in the air. "Any other woman living would shrink from the disgrace of touching him!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, God! I despise myself even more heartily than I despise *him!*"

The tears were forcing their way into my eyes in spite of me—the horror of it was to be endured no longer.

"You shall know that you have wronged me, yet," I said. "Or you shall never see me again!"

With those words, I left her. She started up from the chair on which she had dropped the moment before: she started up—the noble creature! —and followed me across the outer room, with a last merciful word at parting.

"Franklin!" she said, "I forgive you! Oh, Franklin! Franklin! we shall never meet again. Say you forgive *me!*"

I turned, so as to let my face show her that I was past speaking—I turned, and waved my hand, and saw her dimly, as in a vision, through the tears that had conquered me at last.

The next moment, the worst bitterness of it was over. I was out in the garden again. I saw her, and heard her, no more.

CHAPTER VIII.

LATE that evening, I was surprised at my lodgings by a visit from Mr. Bruff.

There was a noticeable change in the lawyer's manner. It had lost its usual confidence and spirit. He shook hands with me, for the first time in his life, in silence.

"Are you going back to Hampstead?" I asked, by way of saying something.

"I have just left Hampstead," he answered. "I know, Mr. Franklin, that you have got at the truth at last. But, I tell you plainly, if I could have foreseen the price that was to be paid for it, I should have preferred leaving you in the dark."

"You have seen Rachel?"

"I have come here after taking her back to Portland Place; it was impossible to let her return in the carriage by herself. I can hardly hold you responsible—considering that you saw her in my

house and by my permission—for the shock that this unlucky interview has inflicted on her. All I can do is to provide against a repetition of the mischief. She is young—she has a resolute spirit—she will get over this, with time and rest to help her. I want to be assured that you will do nothing to hinder her recovery. May I depend on your making no second attempt to see her—except with my sanction and approval?"

"After what she has suffered, and after what I have suffered," I said, "you may rely on me."

"I have your promise?"

"You have my promise."

Mr. Bruff looked relieved. He put down his hat, and drew his chair nearer to mine.

"That's settled!" he said. "Now, about the future—*your* future, I mean. To my mind, the result of the extraordinary turn which the matter has now taken is briefly this. In the first place, we are sure that Rachel has told you the whole truth, as plainly as words can tell it. In the second place—though we know that there must be some dreadful mistake somewhere—we can hardly blame her for believing you to be guilty, on the evidence of her own senses; backed, as that evidence has been, by circumstances which appear, on the face of them, to tell dead against you."

There I interposed. "I don't blame Rachel," I said. "I only regret that she could not prevail on herself to speak more plainly to me at the time."

"You might as well regret that Rachel is not somebody else," rejoined Mr. Bruff. "And even then, I doubt if a girl of any delicacy, whose heart had been set on marrying you, could have brought herself to charge you to your face with being a thief. Anyhow, it was not in Rachel's nature to do it. In a very different matter to this matter of yours—which placed her, however, in a position not altogether unlike her position towards you—I happen to know that she was influenced by a similar motive to the motive which actuated her conduct in your case. Besides, as she told me herself, on our way to town this evening, if she *had* spoken plainly, she would no more have believed your denial then than she believes it now. What answer can you make to that? There is no answer to be made to it. Come, come, Mr. Franklin! my view of the case has been proved to be all wrong, I admit—but, as things are now, my advice may be worth having for all that. I tell you plainly, we shall be wasting our time, and cudgelling our brains to no purpose, if we attempt to try back, and unravel this frightful complication from

the beginning. Let us close our minds resolutely to all that happened last year at Lady Verinder's country house; and let us look to what we *can* discover in the future, instead of to what we can *not* discover in the past."

"Surely you forget," I said, "that the whole thing is essentially a matter of the past—so far as I am concerned?"

"Answer me this," retorted Mr. Bruff. "Is the Moonstone at the bottom of all the mischief—or is it not?"

"It is—of course."

"Very good. What do we believe was done with the Moonstone, when it was taken to London?"

"It was pledged to Mr. Luker."

"We know that you are not the person who pledged it. Do we know who did?"

"No."

"Where do we believe the Moonstone to be now?"

"Deposited in the keeping of Mr. Luker's bankers."

"Exactly. Now observe. We are already in the month of June. Towards the end of the month (I can't be particular to a day) a year will have elapsed from the time when we believe the jewel

to have been pledged. There is a chance—to say the least—that the person who pawned it, may be prepared to redeem it when the year's time has expired. If he redeems it, Mr. Luker must himself—according to the terms of his own arrangement—take the Diamond out of his bankers' hands. Under these circumstances, I propose setting a watch at the bank, as the present month draws to an end, and discovering who the person is to whom Mr. Luker restores the Moonstone. Do you see it now?"

I admitted (a little unwillingly) that the idea was a new one, at any rate.

"It's Mr. Murthwaite's idea quite as much as mine," said Mr. Bruff. "It might have never entered my head, but for a conversation we had together some time since. If Mr. Murthwaite is right, the Indians are likely to be on the look-out at the bank, towards the end of the month too—and something serious may come of it. What comes of it doesn't matter to you and me—except as it may help us to lay our hands on the mysterious Somebody who pawned the Diamond. That person, you may rely on it, is responsible (I don't pretend to know how) for the position in which you stand at this moment; and that person alone can set you right in Rachel's estimation."

"I can't deny," I said, "that the plan you propose meets the difficulty in a way that is very daring, and very ingenious, and very new. But——"

"But you have an objection to make?"

"Yes. My objection is, that your proposal obliges us to wait."

"Granted. As I reckon the time, it requires you to wait about a fortnight—more or less. Is that so very long?"

"It's a life-time, Mr. Bruff, in such a situation as mine. My existence will be simply unendurable to me, unless I do something towards clearing my character at once."

"Well, well, I understand that. Have you thought yet of what you can do?"

"I have thought of consulting Sergeant Cuff."

"He has retired from the police. It's useless to expect the Sergeant to help you."

"I know where to find him; and I can but try."

"Try," said Mr. Bruff, after a moment's consideration. "The case has assumed such an extraordinary aspect since Sergeant Cuff's time, that you *may* revive his interest in the inquiry. Try, and let me hear the result. In the meanwhile," he continued, rising, "if you make no discoveries between this, and the end of the month, am I free

to try, on my side, what can be done by keeping a look-out at the bank?"

"Certainly," I answered—"unless I relieve you of all necessity for trying the experiment in the interval."

Mr. Bruff smiled, and took up his hat.

"Tell Sergeant Cuff," he rejoined, "that *I* say the discovery of the truth depends on the discovery of the person who pawned the Diamond. And let me hear what the Sergeant's experience says to that."

So we parted, for that night.

Early the next morning, I set forth for the little town of Dorking—the place of Sergeant Cuff's retirement, as indicated to me by Betteredge.

Inquiring at the hotel, I received the necessary directions for finding the Sergeant's cottage. It was approached by a quiet bye-road, a little way out of the town, and it stood snugly in the middle of its own plot of garden ground, protected by a good brick wall at the back and the sides, and by a high quickset hedge in front. The gate, ornamented at the upper part by smartly-painted trellis-work, was locked. After ringing at the bell, I peered through the trellis-work, and saw the great Cuff's favourite flower everywhere; blooming in his garden, clustering over his door, looking in at his windows. Far

from the crimes and the mysteries of the great city, the illustrious thief-taker was placidly living out the last Sybarite years of his life, smothered in roses!

A decent elderly woman opened the gate to me, and at once annihilated all the hopes I had built on securing the assistance of Sergeant Cuff. He had started, only the day before, on a journey to Ireland.

"Has he gone there on business?" I asked.

The woman smiled. "He has only one business now, sir," she said; "and that's roses. Some great man's gardener in Ireland has found out something new in the growing of roses—and Mr. Cuff's away to inquire into it."

"Do you know when he will be back?"

"It's quite uncertain, sir. Mr. Cuff said he should come back directly, or be away some time, just according as he found the new discovery worth nothing, or worth looking into. If you have any message to leave for him, I'll take care, sir, that he gets it."

I gave her my card, having first written on it in pencil: "I have something to say about the Moonstone. Let me hear from you as soon as you get back." That done, there was nothing left but to submit to circumstances, and return to London.

In the irritable condition of my mind, at the time of which I am now writing, the abortive result of my journey to the Sergeant's cottage simply aggravated the restless impulse in me to be doing something. On the day of my return from Dorking, I determined that the next morning should find me bent on a new effort at forcing my way, through all obstacles, from the darkness to the light.

What form was my next experiment to take?

If the excellent Betteredge had been present while I was considering that question, and if he had been let into the secret of my thoughts, he would, no doubt, have declared that the German side of me was, on this occasion, my uppermost side. To speak seriously, it is perhaps possible that my German training was in some degree responsible for the labyrinth of useless speculations in which I now involved myself. For the greater part of the night, I sat smoking, and building up theories, one more profoundly improbable than another. When I did get to sleep, my waking fancies pursued me in dreams. I rose the next morning, with Objective-Subjective and Subjective-Objective inextricably entangled together in my mind; and I began the day which was to witness my next effort at practical action of some kind, by doubting whether I had any sort of right (on purely philosophical grounds)

to consider any sort of thing (the Diamond included) as existing at all.

How long I might have remained lost in the mist of my own metaphysics, if I had been left to extricate myself, it is impossible for me to say. As the event proved, accident came to my rescue, and happily delivered me. I happened to wear, that morning, the same coat which I had worn on the day of my interview with Rachel. Searching for something else in one of the pockets, I came upon a crumpled piece of paper, and, taking it out, found Betteredge's forgotten letter in my hand.

It seemed hard on my good old friend to leave him without a reply. I went to my writing-table, and read his letter again.

A letter which has nothing of the slightest importance in it, is not always an easy letter to answer. Betteredge's present effort at corresponding with me came within this category. Mr. Candy's assistant, otherwise Ezra Jennings, had told his master that he had seen me; and Mr. Candy, in his turn, wanted to see me and say something to me, when I was next in the neighbourhood of Frizinghall. What was to be said in answer to that, which would be worth the paper it was written on? I sat idly drawing likenesses from memory of Mr. Candy's remarkable-looking assistant, on the

sheet of paper which I had vowed to dedicate to Betteredge—until it suddenly occurred to me that here was the irrepressible Ezra Jennings getting in my way again! I threw a dozen portraits, at least, of the man with the piebald hair (the hair in every case, remarkably like), into the waste-paper basket—and then and there, wrote my answer to Betteredge. It was a perfectly commonplace letter—but it had one excellent effect on me. The effort of writing a few sentences, in plain English, completely cleared my mind of the cloudy nonsense which had filled it since the previous day.

Devoting myself once more to the elucidation of the impenetrable puzzle which my own position presented to me, I now tried to meet the difficulty by investigating it from a plainly practical point of view. The events of the memorable night being still unintelligible to me, I looked a little farther back, and searched my memory of the earlier hours of the birthday for any incident which might prove of some assistance to me in finding the clue.

Had anything happened while Rachel and I were finishing the painted door? or, later, when I rode over to Frizinghall? or afterwards, when I went back with Godfrey Ablewhite and his sisters? or, later again, when I put the Moonstone into Rachel's hands? or, later still, when the company came,

and we all assembled round the dinner-table? My memory disposed of that string of questions readily enough, until I came to the last. Looking back at the social events of the birthday dinner, I found myself brought to a standstill at the outset of the inquiry. I was not even capable of accurately remembering the number of the guests who had sat at the same table with me.

To feel myself completly at fault here, and to conclude, thereupon, that the incidents of the dinner might especially repay the trouble of investigating them, formed parts of the same mental process, in my case. I believe other people, in a similar situation, would have reasoned as I did. When the pursuit of our own interests causes us to become objects of inquiry to ourselves, we are naturally suspicious of what we don't know. Once in possession of the names of the persons who had been present at the dinner, I resolved—as a means of enriching the deficient resources of my own memory—to appeal to the memories of the rest of the guests; to write down all that they could recollect of the social events of the birthday; and to test the result, thus obtained, by the light of what had happened afterwards, when the company had left the house.

This last and newest of my many contemplated

experiments in the art of inquiry—which Betteredge would probably have attributed to the clear-headed, or French, side of me being uppermost for the moment—may fairly claim record here, on its own merits. Unlikely as it may seem, I had now actually groped my way to the root of the matter at last. All I wanted was a hint to guide me in the right direction at starting. Before another day had passed over my head, that hint was given me by one of the company who had been present at the birthday feast!

With the plan of proceeding which I now had in view, it was first necessary to possess the complete list of the guests. This I could easily obtain from Gabriel Betteredge. I determined to go back to Yorkshire on that day, and to begin my contemplated investigation the next morning.

It was just too late to start by the train which left London before noon. There was no alternative but to wait, nearly three hours, for the departure of the next train. Was there anything I could do in London, which might usefully occupy this interval of time?

My thoughts went back again obstinately to the birthday dinner.

Though I had forgotten the numbers, and, in

many cases, the names of the guests, I remembered readily enough that by far the larger proportion of them came from Frizinghall, or from its neighbourhood. But the larger proportion was not all. Some few of us were not regular residents in the country. I myself was one of the few. Mr. Murthwaite was another. Godfrey Ablewhite was a third. Mr. Bruff—no: I called to mind that business had prevented Mr. Bruff from making one of the party. Had any ladies been present, whose usual residence was in London? I could only remember Miss Clack as coming within this latter category. However, here were three of the guests, at any rate, whom it was clearly advisable for me to see before I left town. I drove off at once to Mr. Bruff's office; not knowing the addresses of the persons of whom I was in search, and thinking it probable that he might put me in the way of finding them.

Mr. Bruff proved to be too busy to give me more than a minute of his valuable time. In that minute, however, he contrived to dispose—in the most discouraging manner—of all the questions I had to put to him.

In the first place, he considered my newly-discovered method of finding a clue to the mystery as something too purely fanciful to be seriously discussed. In the second, third, and fourth places,

Mr. Murthwaite was now on his way back to the scene of his past adventures; Miss Clack had suffered losses, and had settled, from motives of economy, in France; Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite might, or might not, be discoverable somewhere in London. Suppose I inquired at his club? And suppose I excused Mr. Bruff, if he went back to his business and wished me good morning?

The field of inquiry in London, being now so narrowed as only to include the one necessity of discovering Godfrey's address, I took the lawyer's hint, and drove to his club.

In the hall, I met with one of the members, who was an old friend of my cousin's, and who was also an acquaintance of my own. This gentleman, after enlightening me on the subject of Godfrey's address, told me of two recent events in his life, which were of some importance in themselves, and which had not previously reached my ears.

It appeared that Godfrey, far from being discouraged by Rachel's withdrawal from her engagement to him, had made matrimonial advances soon afterwards to another young lady, reputed to be a great heiress. His suit had prospered, and his marriage had been considered as a settled and certain thing. But, here again, the engagement had been suddenly and unexpectedly broken off—

owing, it was said, on this occasion, to a serious difference of opinion between the bridegroom and the lady's father, on the question of settlements.

As some compensation for this second matrimonial disaster, Godfrey had soon afterwards found himself the object of fond pecuniary remembrance, on the part of one of his many admirers. A rich old lady—highly respected at the Mothers'-Small-Clothes-Conversion-Society, and a great friend of Miss Clack's (to whom she had left nothing but a mourning ring)—had bequeathed to the admirable and meritorious Godfrey a legacy of five thousand pounds. After receiving this handsome addition to his own modest pecuniary resources, he had been heard to say that he felt the necessity of getting a little respite from his charitable labours, and that his doctor prescribed "a run on the Continent, as likely to be productive of much future benefit to his health." If I wanted to see him, it would be advisable to lose no time in paying my contemplated visit.

I went, then and there, to pay my visit.

The same fatality which had made me just one day too late in calling on Sergeant Cuff, made me again one day too late in calling on Godfrey. He had left London, on the previous morning, by the tidal train, for Dover. He was to cross to Ostend;

and his servant believed he was going on to Brussels. The time of his return was a little uncertain; but I might be sure he would be away at least three months.

I went back to my lodgings a little depressed in spirits. Three of the guests at the birthday dinner —and those three all exceptionally intelligent people—were out of my reach, at the very time when it was most important to be able to communicate with them. My last hopes now rested on Betteredge, and on the friends of the late Lady Verinder whom I might still find living in the neighbourhood of Rachel's country house.

On this occasion, I travelled straight to Frizinghall—the town being now the central point in my field of inquiry. I arrived too late in the evening to be able to communicate with Betteredge. The next morning, I sent a messenger with a letter, requesting him to join me at the hotel, at his earliest convenience.

Having taken the precaution—partly to save time, partly to accommodate Betteredge—of sending my messenger in a fly, I had a reasonable prospect, if no delays occurred, of seeing the old man within less than two hours from the time when I had sent for him. During this interval, I arranged

to employ myself in opening my contemplated inquiry, among the guests present at the birthday dinner who were personally known to me, and who were easily within my reach. These were my relatives, the Ablewhites, and Mr. Candy. The doctor had expressed a special wish to see me, and the doctor lived in the next street. So to Mr. Candy I went first.

After what Betteredge had told me, I naturally anticipated finding traces in the doctor's face of the severe illness from which he had suffered. But I was utterly unprepared for such a change as I saw in him when he entered the room and shook hands with me. His eyes were dim; his hair had turned completely grey; his face was wizen; his figure had shrunk. I looked at the once lively, rattlepated, humorous little doctor—associated in my remembrance with the perpetration of incorrigible social indiscretions and innumerable boyish jokes—and I saw nothing left of his former self, but the old tendency to vulgar smartness in his dress. The man was a wreck; but his clothes and his jewellery—in cruel mockery of the change in him—were as gay and as gaudy as ever.

"I have often thought of you, Mr. Blake," he said; "and I am heartily glad to see you again at last. If there is anything I can do for you, pray

command my services, sir—pray command my services!"

He said those few common-place words with needless hurry and eagerness, and with a curiosity to know what had brought me to Yorkshire, which he was perfectly—I might say childishly—incapable of concealing from notice.

With the object that I had in view, I had of course foreseen the necessity of entering into some sort of personal explanation, before I could hope to interest people, mostly strangers to me, in doing their best to assist my inquiry. On the journey to Frizinghall I had arranged what my explanation was to be—and I seized the opportunity now offered to me of trying the effect of it on Mr. Candy.

"I was in Yorkshire, the other day, and I am in Yorkshire again now, on rather a romantic errand," I said. "It is a matter, Mr. Candy, in which the late Lady Verinder's friends all took some interest. You remember the mysterious loss of the Indian Diamond, now nearly a year since? Circumstances have lately happened which lead to the hope that it may yet be found—and I am interesting myself, as one of the family, in recovering it. Among the obstacles in my way, there is the necessity of collecting again all the evidence which was discovered

at the time, and more if possible. There are peculiarities in this case which make it desirable to revive my recollection of everything that happened in the house, on the evening of Miss Verinder's birthday. And I venture to appeal to her late mother's friends who were present on that occasion, to lend me the assistance of their memories——"

I had got as far as that in rehearsing my explanatory phrases, when I was suddenly checked by seeing plainly in Mr. Candy's face that my experiment on him was a total failure.

The little doctor sat restlessly picking at the points of his fingers all the time I was speaking. His dim watery eyes were fixed on my face with an expression of vacant and wistful inquiry very painful to see. What he was thinking of, it was impossible to divine. The one thing clearly visible was that I had failed, after the first two or three words, in fixing his attention. The only chance of recalling him to himself appeared to lie in changing the subject. I tried a new topic immediately.

"So much," I said, gaily, "for what brings me to Frizinghall! Now, Mr. Candy, it's your turn. You sent me a message by Gabriel Betteredge——"

He left off picking at his fingers, and suddenly brightened up.

"Yes! yes! yes!" he exclaimed eagerly. "That's it! I sent you a message!"

"And Betteredge duly communicated it by letter," I went on. "You had something to say to me, the next time I was in your neighbourhood. Well, Mr. Candy, here I am!"

"Here you are!" echoed the doctor. "And Betteredge was quite right. I had something to say to you. That was my message. Betteredge is a wonderful man. What a memory! At his age, what a memory!"

He dropped back into silence, and began picking at his fingers again. Recollecting what I had heard from Betteredge about the effect of the fever on his memory, I went on with the conversation, in the hope that I might help him at starting.

"It's a long time since we met," I said. "We last saw each other at the last birthday dinner my poor aunt was ever to give."

"That's it!" cried Mr. Candy. "The birthday dinner!" He started impulsively to his feet, and looked at me. A deep flush suddenly overspread his faded face, and he abruptly sat down again, as if conscious of having betrayed a weakness which he would fain have concealed. It was plain, pitiably plain, that he was aware of his own defect

of memory, and that he was bent on hiding it from the observation of his friends.

Thus far, he had appealed to my compassion only. But the words he had just said—few as they were—roused my curiosity instantly to the highest pitch. The birthday dinner had already become the one event in the past, at which I looked back with strangely-mixed feelings of hope and distrust. And here was the birthday dinner unmistakably proclaiming itself as the subject on which Mr. Candy had something important to say to me!

I attempted to help him out once more. But, this time, my own interests were at the bottom of my compassionate motive, and they hurried me on a little too abruptly to the end I had in view.

"It's nearly a year now," I said, "since we sat at that pleasant table. Have you made any memorandum—in your diary, or otherwise—of what you wanted to say to me?"

Mr. Candy understood the suggestion, and showed me that he understood it, as an insult.

"I require no memorandums, Mr. Blake," he said, stiffly enough. "I am not such a very old man, yet—and my memory (thank God) is to be thoroughly depended on!"

It is needless to say that I declined to understand that he was offended with me.

"I wish I could say the same of *my* memory," I answered. "When *I* try to think of matters that are a year old, I seldom find my remembrance as vivid as I could wish it to be. Take the dinner at Lady Verinder's, for instance——"

Mr. Candy brightened up again, the moment the allusion passed my lips.

"Ah! the dinner, the dinner at Lady Verinder's!" he exclaimed, more eagerly than ever. "I have got something to say to you about that."

His eyes looked at me again with the painful expression of inquiry, so wistful, so vacant, so miserably helpless to see. He was evidently trying hard, and trying in vain, to recover the lost recollection. "It was a very pleasant dinner," he burst out suddenly, with an air of saying exactly what he had wanted to say. "A very pleasant dinner, Mr. Blake, wasn't it?" He nodded and smiled, and appeared to think, poor fellow, that he had succeeded in concealing the total failure of his memory, by a well-timed exertion of his own presence of mind.

It was so distressing that I at once shifted the talk—deeply as I was interested in his recovering the lost remembrance—to topics of local interest.

Here, he got on glibly enough. Trumpery little scandals and quarrels in the town, some of them as much as a month old, appeared to recur to his memory readily. He chattered on, with something of the smooth gossiping fluency of former times. But there were moments, even in the full flow of his talkativeness, when he suddenly hesitated—looked at me for a moment with the vacant inquiry once more in his eyes—controlled himself—and went on again. I submitted patiently to my martyrdom (it is surely nothing less than martyrdom, to a man of cosmopolitan sympathies, to absorb in silent resignation the news of a country town?) until the clock on the chimney-piece told me that my visit had been prolonged beyond half an hour. Having now some right to consider the sacrifice as complete, I rose to take leave. As we shook hands, Mr. Candy reverted to the birthday festival of his own accord.

"I am so glad we have met again," he said. "I had it on my mind—I really had it on my mind, Mr. Blake, to speak to you. About the dinner at Lady Verinder's, you know? A pleasant dinner—really a pleasant dinner now, wasn't it?"

On repeating the phrase, he seemed to feel hardly as certain of having prevented me from suspecting his lapse of memory, as he had felt on the

first occasion. The wistful look clouded his face again; and, after apparently designing to accompany me to the street door, he suddenly changed his mind, rang the bell for the servant, and remained in the drawing-room.

I went slowly down the doctor's stairs, feeling the disheartening conviction that he really had something to say which it was vitally important to me to hear, and that he was morally incapable of saying it. The effort of remembering that he wanted to speak to me was, but too evidently, the only effort that his enfeebled memory was now able to achieve.

Just as I had reached the bottom of the stairs, and had turned a corner on my way to the outer hall, a door opened softly somewhere on the ground floor of the house, and a gentle voice said behind me;—

"I am afraid, sir, you find Mr. Candy sadly changed?"

I turned round, and found myself face to face with Ezra Jennings.

CHAPTER IX.

THE doctor's pretty housemaid stood waiting for me, with the street-door open in her hand. Pouring brightly into the hall, the morning light fell full on the face of Mr. Candy's assistant when I turned, and looked at him.

It was impossible to dispute Betteredge's assertion that the appearance of Ezra Jennings, speaking from the popular point of view, was against him. His gipsy-complexion, his fleshless cheeks, his gaunt facial bones, his dreamy eyes, his extraordinary parti-coloured hair, the puzzling contradiction between his face and figure which made him look old and young both together—were all more or less calculated to produce an unfavourable impression of him on a stranger's mind. And yet—feeling this as I certainly did—it is not to be denied that Ezra Jennings made some inscrutable appeal to my sympathies, which I found it impossible to resist.

While my knowledge of the world warned me to answer the question which he had put, acknowledging that I did indeed find Mr. Candy sadly changed, and then to proceed on my way out of the house—my interest in Ezra Jennings held me rooted to the place, and gave him the opportunity of speaking to me in private about his employer, for which he had been evidently on the watch.

"Are you walking my way, Mr. Jennings?" I said, observing that he held his hat in his hand. "I am going to call on my aunt, Mrs. Ablewhite."

Ezra Jennings replied that he had a patient to see, and that he was walking my way.

We left the house together. I observed that the pretty servant girl—who was all smiles and amiability, when I wished her good morning on my way out—received a modest little message from Ezra Jennings, relating to the time at which he might be expected to return, with pursed-up lips, and with eyes which ostentatiously looked anywhere rather than look in his face. The poor wretch was evidently no favourite in the house. Out of the house, I had Betteredge's word for it that he was unpopular everywhere. "What a life!" I thought to myself, as we descended the doctor's doorsteps.

Having already referred to Mr. Candy's illness on his side, Ezra Jennings now appeared deter-

mined to leave it to me to resume the subject. His silence said significantly, "It's your turn now." I, too, had my reasons for referring to the doctor's illness; and I readily accepted the responsibility of speaking first.

"Judging by the change I see in him," I began, "Mr. Candy's illness must have been far more serious than I had supposed?"

"It is almost a miracle," said Ezra Jennings, "that he lived through it."

"Is his memory never any better than I have found it to-day? He has been trying to speak to me——"

"Of something which happened before he was taken ill?" asked the assistant, observing that I hesitated.

"Yes."

"His memory of events, at that past time, is hopelessly enfeebled," said Ezra Jennings. "It is almost to be deplored, poor fellow, that even the wreck of it remains. While he remembers, dimly, plans that he formed—things, here and there, that he had to say or do, before his illness—he is perfectly incapable of recalling what the plans were, or what the thing was that he had to say or do. He is painfully conscious of his own deficiency, and painfully anxious, as you must have seen, to hide it from

observation. If he could only have recovered, in a complete state of oblivion as to the past, he would have been a happier man. Perhaps we should all be happier," he added, with a sad smile, "if we could but completely forget!"

"There are some events surely in all men's lives," I replied, "the memory of which they would be unwilling entirely to lose?"

"That is, I hope, to be said of most men, Mr. Blake. I am afraid it cannot truly be said of *all.* Have you any reason to suppose that the lost remembrance which Mr. Candy tried to recover—while you were speaking to him just now—was a remembrance which it was important to *you* that he should recal?"

In saying those words, he had touched, of his own accord, on the very point upon which I was anxious to consult him. The interest I felt in this strange man had impelled me, in the first instance, to give him the opportunity of speaking to me; reserving what I might have to say, on my side, in relation to his employer, until I was first satisfied that he was a person in whose delicacy and discretion I could trust. The little that he had said, thus far, had been sufficient to convince me that I was speaking to a gentleman. He had what I may venture to describe as the *unsought self-possession,*

which is a sure sign of good breeding, not in England only, but everywhere else in the civilised world. Whatever the object which he had in view, in putting the question that he had just addressed to me, I felt no doubt that I was justified—so far—in answering him without reserve.

"I believe I have a strong interest," I said, "in tracing the lost remembrance which Mr. Candy was unable to recal. May I ask whether you can suggest to me any method by which I might assist his memory?"

Ezra Jennings looked at me, with a sudden flash of interest in his dreamy brown eyes.

"Mr. Candy's memory is beyond the reach of assistance," he said. "I have tried to help it often enough, since his recovery, to be able to speak positively on that point."

This disappointed me; and I owned it.

"I confess you led me to hope for a less discouraging answer than that," I said.

Ezra Jennings smiled. "It may not, perhaps, be a final answer, Mr. Blake. It may be possible to trace Mr. Candy's lost recollection, without the necessity of appealing to Mr. Candy himself."

"Indeed? Is it an indiscretion, on my part, to ask——how?"

"By no means. My only difficulty in answer-

ing your question, is the difficulty of explaining myself. May I trust to your patience, if I refer once more to Mr. Candy's illness; and if I speak of it this time, without sparing you certain professional details?"

"Pray go on! You have interested me already in hearing the details."

My eagerness seemed to amuse—perhaps, I might rather say, to please him. He smiled again. We had by this time left the last houses in the town behind us. Ezra Jennings stopped for a moment, and picked some wild flowers from the hedge by the roadside. "How beautiful they are!" he said, simply, showing his little nosegay to me. "And how few people in England seem to admire them as they deserve!"

"You have not always been in England?" I said.

"No. I was born, and partly brought up, in one of our colonies. My father was an Englishman; but my mother——We are straying away from our subject, Mr. Blake; and it is my fault. The truth is, I have associations with these modest little hedgeside flowers——It doesn't matter; we were speaking of Mr. Candy. To Mr. Candy let us return."

Connecting the few words about himself which

thus reluctantly escaped him, with the melancholy view of life which led him to place the conditions of human happiness in complete oblivion of the past, I felt satisfied that the story which I had read in his face was, in two particulars at least, the story that it really told. He had suffered as few men suffer; and there was the mixture of some foreign race in his English blood.

"You have heard, I dare say, of the original cause of Mr. Candy's illness?" he resumed. "The night of Lady Verinder's dinner-party was a night of heavy rain. My employer drove home through it in his gig, and reached the house, wetted to the skin. He found an urgent message from a patient, waiting for him; and he most unfortunately went at once to visit the sick person, without stopping to change his clothes. I was myself professionally detained, that night, by a case at some distance from Frizinghall. When I got back the next morning, I found Mr. Candy's groom waiting in great alarm to take me to his master's room. By that time the mischief was done; the illness had set in."

"The illness has only been described to me, in general terms, as a fever," I said.

"I can add nothing which will make the description more accurate," answered Ezra Jennings.

"From first to last the fever assumed no specific form. I sent at once to two of Mr. Candy's medical friends in the town, both physicians, to come and give me their opinion of the case. They agreed with me that it looked serious; but they both strongly dissented from the view I took of the treatment. We differed entirely in the conclusions which we drew from the patient's pulse. The two doctors, arguing from the rapidity of the beat, declared that a lowering treatment was the only treatment to be adopted. On my side, I admitted the rapidity of the pulse, but I also pointed to its alarming feebleness as indicating an exhausted condition of the system, and as showing a plain necessity for the administration of stimulants. The two doctors were for keeping him on gruel, lemonade, barley water, and so on. I was for giving him champagne, or brandy, ammonia, and quinine. A serious difference of opinion, as you see! a difference between two physicians of established local repute, and a stranger who was only an assistant in the house. For the first few days, I had no choice but to give way to my elders and betters; the patient steadily sinking all the time. I made a second attempt to appeal to the plain, undeniably plain, evidence of the pulse. Its rapidity was unchecked, and its feebleness had increased.

The two doctors took offence at my obstinacy. They said, 'Mr. Jennings, either we manage this case, or you manage it. Which is it to be?' I said, 'Gentlemen, give me five minutes to consider, and that plain question shall have a plain reply.' When the time expired, I was ready with my answer. I said, 'You positively refuse to try the stimulant treatment?' They refused in so many words. 'I mean to try it at once, gentlemen.'— 'Try it, Mr. Jennings; and we withdraw from the case.' I sent down to the cellar for a bottle of champagne; and I administered half a tumbler-full of it to the patient with my own hand. The two physicians took up their hats in silence, and left the house."

"You had assumed a serious responsibility," I said. "In your place, I am afraid I should have shrunk from it."

"In my place, Mr. Blake, you would have remembered that Mr. Candy had taken you into his employment, under circumstances which made you his debtor for life. In my place, you would have seen him sinking, hour by hour; and you would have risked anything, rather than let the one man on earth who had befriended you, die before your eyes. Don't suppose that I had no sense of the terrible position in which I had placed myself!

There were moments when I felt all the misery of my friendlessness, all the peril of my dreadful responsibility. If I had been a happy man, if I had led a prosperous life, I believe I should have sunk under the task I had imposed on myself. But *I* had no happy time to look back at, no past peace of mind to force itself into contrast with my present anxiety and suspense—and I held firm to my resolution through it all. I took an interval in the middle of the day, when my patient's condition was at its best, for the repose I needed. For the rest of the four-and-twenty hours, as long as his life was in danger, I never left his bedside. Towards sunset, as usual in such cases, the delirium incidental to the fever came on. It lasted more or less through the night; and then intermitted, at that terrible time in the early morning—from two o'clock to five—when the vital energies even of the healthiest of us are at their lowest. It is then that Death gathers in his human harvest most abundantly. It was then that Death and I fought our fight over the bed, which should have the man who lay on it. I never hesitated in pursuing the treatment on which I had staked everything. When wine failed, I tried brandy. When the other stimulants lost their influence, I doubled the dose. After an interval of suspense—the like of which I hope

to God I shall never feel again—there came a day when the rapidity of the pulse slightly, but appreciably, diminished; and, better still, there came also a change in the beat—an unmistakable change to steadiness and strength. *Then*, I knew that I had saved him; and then I own I broke down. I laid the poor fellow's wasted hand back on the bed, and burst out crying. An hysterical relief, Mr. Blake—nothing more! Physiology says, and says truly, that some men are born with female constitutions—and I am one of them!"

He made that bitterly professional apology for his tears, speaking quietly and unaffectedly, as he had spoken throughout. His tone and manner, from beginning to end, showed him to be especially, almost morbidly, anxious not to set himself up as an object of interest to me.

"You may well ask, why I have wearied you with all these details?" he went on. "It is the only way I can see, Mr. Blake, of properly introducing to you what I have to say next. Now you know exactly what my position was, at the time of Mr. Candy's illness, you will the more readily understand the sore need I had of lightening the burden on my mind by giving it, at intervals, some sort of relief. I have had the presumption to occupy my leisure, for some years past, in writing a book,

addressed to the members of my profession—a book on the intricate and delicate subject of the brain and the nervous system. My work will probably never be finished; and it will certainly never be published. It has none the less been the friend of many lonely hours; and it helped me to while away the anxious time—the time of waiting, and nothing else—at Mr. Candy's bedside. I told you he was delirious, I think? And I mentioned the time at which his delirium came on?"

"Yes."

"Well, I had reached a section of my book, at that time, which touched on this same question of delirium. I won't trouble you at any length with my theory on the subject—I will confine myself to telling you only what it is your present interest to know. It has often occurred to me in the course of my medical practice, to doubt whether we can justifiably infer—in cases of delirium—that the loss of the faculty of speaking connectedly, implies of necessity the loss of the faculty of thinking connectedly as well. Poor Mr. Candy's illness gave me an opportunity of putting this doubt to the test. I understand the art of writing in shorthand; and I was able to take down the patient's 'wanderings,' exactly as they fell from his lips.—Do you see, Mr. Blake, what I am coming to at last?"

I saw it clearly, and waited with breathless interest to hear more.

"At odds and ends of time," Ezra Jennings went on, "I reproduced my shorthand notes, in the ordinary form of writing—leaving large spaces between the broken phrases, and even the single words, as they had fallen disconnectedly from Mr. Candy's lips. I then treated the result thus obtained, on something like the principle which one adopts in putting together a child's 'puzzle.' It is all confusion to begin with; but it may be all brought into order and shape, if you can only find the right way. Acting on this plan, I filled in the blank spaces on the paper, with what the words or phrases on either side of it suggested to me as the speaker's meaning; altering over and over again, until my additions followed naturally on the spoken words which came before them, and fitted naturally into the spoken words which came after them. The result was, that I not only occupied in this way many vacant and anxious hours, but that I arrived at something which was (as it seemed to me) a confirmation of the theory that I held. In plainer words, after putting the broken sentences together I found the superior faculty of thinking going on, more or less connectedly, in my patient's mind, while the inferior faculty of expression was in

a state of almost complete incapacity and confusion."

"One word!" I interposed, eagerly. "Did my name occur in any of his wanderings?"

"You shall hear, Mr. Blake. Among my written proofs of the assertion which I have just advanced—or, I ought to say, among the written experiments, tending to put my assertion to the proof—there *is* one, in which your name occurs. For nearly the whole of one night, Mr. Candy's mind was occupied with *something* between himself and you. I have got the broken words, as they dropped from his lips, on one sheet of paper. And I have got the links of my own discovering which connect those words together, on another sheet of paper. The product (as the arithmeticians would say) is an intelligible statement—first, of something actually done in the past; secondly, of something which Mr. Candy contemplated doing in the future, if his illness had not got in the way, and stopped him. The question is whether this does, or does not, represent the lost recollection which he vainly attempted to find when you called on him this morning?"

"Not a doubt of it!" I answered. "Let us go back directly, and look at the papers!"

"Quite impossible, Mr. Blake."

"Why?"

"Put yourself in my position for a moment," said Ezra Jennings. "Would *you* disclose to another person what had dropped unconsciously from the lips of your suffering patient and your helpless friend, without first knowing that there was a necessity to justify you in opening your lips?"

I felt that he was unanswerable, here; but I tried to argue the question, nevertheless.

"My conduct in such a delicate matter as you describe," I replied, "would depend greatly on whether the disclosure was of a nature to compromise my friend, or not."

"I have disposed of all necessity for considering that side of the question, long since," said Ezra Jennings. "Wherever my notes included anything which Mr. Candy might have wished to keep secret, those notes have been destroyed. My manuscript-experiments at my friend's bedside, include nothing, now, which he would have hesitated to communicate to others, if he had recovered the use of his memory. In your case, I have even reason to suppose that my notes contain something which he actually wished to say to you——"

"And yet, you hesitate?"

"And yet, I hesitate. Remember the circumstances, under which I obtained the information

which I possess! Harmless as it is, I cannot prevail upon myself to give it up to you, unless you first satisfy me that there is a reason for doing so. He was so miserably ill, Mr. Blake! and he was so helplessly dependent upon Me! Is it too much to ask, if I request you only to hint to me what your interest is in the lost recollection—or what you believe that lost recollection to be?"

To have answered him with the frankness which his language and his manner both claimed from me, would have been to commit myself to openly acknowledging that I was suspected of the theft of the Diamond. Strongly as Ezra Jennings had intensified the first impulsive interest which I had felt in him, he had not overcome my unconquerable reluctance to disclose the degrading position in which I stood. I took refuge once more in the explanatory phrases with which I had prepared myself to meet the curiosity of strangers.

This time, I had no reason to complain of a want of attention on the part of the person to whom I addressed myself. Ezra Jennings listened patiently, even anxiously, until I had done.

"I am sorry to have raised your expectations, Mr. Blake, only to disappoint them," he said. "Throughout the whole period of Mr. Candy's illness, from first to last, not one word about the

Diamond escaped his lips. The matter with which I heard him connect your name has, I can assure you, no discoverable relation whatever with the loss or the recovery of Miss Verinder's jewel."

We arrived, as he said those words, at a place where the highway along which we had been walking, branched off into two roads. One led to Mr. Ablewhite's house; and the other to a moorland village some two or three miles off. Ezra Jennings stopped at the road which led to the village.

"My way lies in this direction," he said. "I am really and truly sorry, Mr. Blake, that I can be of no use to you."

His voice told me that he spoke sincerely. His soft brown eyes rested on me for a moment with a look of melancholy interest. He bowed, and went, without another word, on his way to the village.

For a minute or more, I stood and watched him, walking farther and farther away from me; carrying farther and farther away with him what I now firmly believed to be the clue of which I was in search. He turned, after walking on a little way, and looked back. Seeing me still standing at the place where we had parted, he stopped, as if doubting whether I might not wish to speak to

him again. There was no time for me to reason out my own situation—to remind myself that I was losing my opportunity, at what might be the turning point of my life, and all to flatter nothing more important than my own self-esteem! There was only time to call him back first, and to think afterwards. I suspect I am one of the rashest of existing men. I called him back—and then I said to myself, "Now there is no help for it. I must tell him the truth!"

He retraced his steps directly. I advanced along the road to meet him.

"Mr. Jennings," I said, "I have not treated you quite fairly. My interest in tracing Mr. Candy's lost recollection, is not the interest of recovering the Moonstone. A serious personal matter is at the bottom of my visit to Yorkshire. I have but one excuse for not having dealt frankly with you in this matter. It is more painful to me than I can say, to mention to anybody what my position really is."

Ezra Jennings looked at me with the first appearance of embarrassment which I had seen in him yet.

"I have no right, Mr. Blake, and no wish," he said, "to intrude myself into your private affairs. Allow me to ask your pardon, on my side, for having (most innocently) put you to a painful test."

"You have a perfect right," I rejoined, "to fix the terms on which you feel justified in revealing what you heard at Mr. Candy's bedside. I understand, and respect, the delicacy which influences you in this matter. How can I expect to be taken into your confidence, if I decline to admit you into mine? You ought to know, and you shall know, why I am interested in discovering what Mr. Candy wanted to say to me. If I turn out to be mistaken in my anticipations, and if you prove unable to help me when you are really aware of what I want, I shall trust to your honour to keep my secret—and something tells me that I shall not trust in vain."

"Stop, Mr. Blake. I have a word to say, which must be said before you go any farther."

I looked at him in astonishment. The grip of some terrible emotion seemed to have seized him, and shaken him to the soul. His gypsy complexion had altered to a livid greyish paleness; his eyes had suddenly become wild and glittering; his voice had dropped to a tone—low, stern, and resolute—which I now heard for the first time. The latent resources in the man, for good or for evil—it was hard, at that moment, to say which—leapt up in him and showed themselves to me, with the suddenness of a flash of light.

"Before you place any confidence in me," he went on, "you ought to know, and you *must* know, under what circumstances I have been received into Mr. Candy's house. It won't take long. I don't profess, sir, to tell my story (as the phrase is) to any man. My story will die with me. All I ask, is to be permitted to tell you, what I have told Mr. Candy. If you are still in the mind, when you have heard that, to say what you have proposed to say, you will command my attention, and command my services. Shall we walk on?"

The suppressed misery in his face, silenced me. I answered his question by a sign. We walked on.

After advancing a few hundred yards, Ezra Jennings stopped at a gap in the rough stone wall which shut off the moor from the road, at this part of it.

"Do you mind resting a little, Mr. Blake?" he asked. "I am not what I was—and some things shake me."

I agreed of course. He led the way through the gap to a patch of turf on the heathy ground, screened by bushes and dwarf trees on the side nearest to the road, and commanding in the opposite direction a grandly desolate view over the broad brown wilderness of the moor. The clouds had gathered, within the last half hour. The light

was dull; the distance was dim. The lovely face of Nature met us, soft and still and colourless—met us without a smile.

We sat down in silence. Ezra Jennings laid aside his hat, and passed his hand wearily over his forehead, wearily through his startling white and black hair. He tossed his little nosegay of wild flowers away from him, as if the remembrances which it recalled were remembrances which hurt him now.

"Mr. Blake!" he said, suddenly. "You are in bad company. The cloud of a horrible accusation has rested on me for years. I tell you the worst at once. I am a man whose life is a wreck, and whose character is gone."

I attempted to speak. He stopped me.

"No," he said. "Pardon me; not yet. Don't commit yourself to expressions of sympathy which you may afterwards wish to recal. I have mentioned an accusation which has rested on me for years. There are circumstances in connexion with it that tell against me. I cannot bring myself to acknowledge what the accusation is. And I am incapable, perfectly incapable, of proving my innocence. I can only assert my innocence. I assert it, sir, on my oath, as a Christian. It is useless to appeal to my honour as a man."

He paused again. I looked round at him. He

never looked at me in return. His whole being seemed to be absorbed in the agony of recollecting, and in the effort to speak.

"There is much that I might say," he went on, "about the merciless treatment of me by my own family, and the merciless enmity to which I have fallen a victim. But the harm is done; the wrong is beyond all remedy. I decline to weary or distress you, sir, if I can help it. At the outset of my career in this country, the vile slander to which I have referred struck me down at once and for ever. I resigned my aspirations in my profession—obscurity was the only hope left for me. I parted with the woman I loved—how could I condemn her to share my disgrace? A medical assistant's place offered itself, in a remote corner of England. I got the place. It promised me peace; it promised me obscurity, as I thought. I was wrong. Evil report, with time and chance to help it, travels patiently, and travels far. The accusation from which I had fled, followed me. I got warning of its approach. I was able to leave my situation voluntarily, with the testimonials that I had earned. They got me another situation in another remote district. Time passed again; and again the slander that was death to my character found me out. On this occasion I had no warning. My employer said,

'Mr. Jennings, I have no complaint to make against you; but you must set yourself right, or leave me.' I had but one choice—I left him. It's useless to dwell on what I suffered after that. I am only forty years old now. Look at my face, and let it tell for me the story of some miserable years. It ended in my drifting to this place, and meeting with Mr. Candy. He wanted an assistant. I referred him, on the question of capacity, to my last employer. The question of character remained. I told him what I have told you—and more. I warned him that there were difficulties in the way, even if he believed me. 'Here, as elsewhere,' I said, 'I scorn the guilty evasion of living under an assumed name: I am no safer at Frizinghall than at other places from the cloud that follows me, go where I may.' He answered, 'I don't do things by halves—I believe you, and I pity you. If *you* will risk what may happen, *I* will risk it too.' God Almighty bless him! He has given me shelter, he has given me employment, he has given me rest of mind—and I have the certain conviction (I have had it for some months past) that nothing will happen now to make him regret it."

"The slander has died out?" I said.

"The slander is as active as ever. But when it follows me here, it will come too late."

"You will have left the place?"

"No, Mr. Blake—I shall be dead. For ten years past, I have suffered from an incurable internal complaint. I don't disguise from you that I should have let the agony of it kill me long since, but for one last interest in life, which makes my existence of some importance to me still. I want to provide for a person—very dear to me—whom I shall never see again. My own little patrimony is hardly sufficient to make her independent of the world. The hope, if I could only live long enough, of increasing it to a certain sum, has impelled me to resist the disease by such palliative means as I could devise. The one effectual palliative in my case, is—opium. To that all-potent and all-merciful drug, I am indebted for a respite of many years from my sentence of death. But even the virtues of opium have their limit. The progress of the disease has gradually forced me from the use of opium, to the abuse of it. I am feeling the penalty at last. My nervous system is shattered; my nights are nights of horror. The end is not far off now. Let it come—I have not lived and worked in vain. The little sum is nearly made up; and I have the means of completing it, if my last reserves of life fail me sooner than I expect. I hardly know how I have wandered into telling you

this. I don't think I am mean enough to appeal to your pity. Perhaps, I fancy you may be all the readier to believe me, if you know that what I have said to you, I have said with the certain knowledge in me that I am a dying man. There is no disguising, Mr. Blake, that you interest me. I have attempted to make my poor friend's loss of memory the means of bettering my acquaintance with you. I have speculated on the chance of your feeling a passing curiosity about what he wanted to say, and of my being able to satisfy it. Is there no excuse for my intruding myself on you? Perhaps there is some excuse. A man who has lived as I have lived has his bitter moments when he ponders over human destiny. You have youth, health, riches, a place in the world, a prospect before you. You, and such as you, show me the sunny side of human life, and reconcile me with the world that I am leaving, before I go. However this talk between us may end, I shall not forget that you have done me a kindness in doing that. It rests with you, sir, to say what you proposed saying, or to wish me good morning."

I had but one answer to make to that appeal. Without a moment's hesitation, I told him the truth, as unreservedly as I have told it in these pages.

He started to his feet, and looked at me with breathless eagerness as I approached the leading incident of my story.

"It is certain that I went into the room," I said; "it is certain that I took the Diamond. I can only meet those two plain facts by declaring that, do what I might, I did it without my own knowledge——"

Ezra Jennings caught me excitedly by the arm.

"Stop!" he said. "You have suggested more to me than you suppose. Have *you* ever been accustomed to the use of opium?"

"I never tasted it in my life."

"Were your nerves out of order, at this time last year? Were you unusually restless and irritable?"

"Yes."

"Did you sleep badly?"

"Wretchedly. Many nights I never slept at all."

"Was the birthday night an exception? Try, and remember. Did you sleep well on that one occasion?"

"I do remember! I slept soundly."

He dropped my arm as suddenly as he had taken it—and looked at me with the air of a man whose mind was relieved of the last doubt that rested on it.

"This is a marked day in your life, and in mine," he said, gravely. "I am absolutely certain, Mr. Blake, of one thing—I have got what Mr. Candy wanted to say to you this morning, in the notes that I took at my patient's bedside. Wait! that is not all. I am firmly persuaded that I can prove you to have been unconscious of what you were about, when you entered the room and took the Diamond. Give me time to think, and time to question you. I believe the vindication of your innocence is in my hands!"

"Explain yourself, for God's sake! What do you mean?"

In the excitement of our colloquy, we had walked on a few steps, beyond the clump of dwarf trees which had hitherto screened us from view. Before Ezra Jennings could answer me, he was hailed from the high road by a man, in great agitation, who had been evidently on the look-out for him.

"I am coming," he called back; "I am coming as fast as I can!" He turned to me. "There is an urgent case waiting for me at the village yonder; I ought to have been there half an hour since—I must attend to it at once. Give me two hours from this time, and call at Mr. Candy's again—and I will engage to be ready for you."

"How am I to wait!" I exclaimed impatiently.

"Can't you quiet my mind by a word of explanation before we part?"

"This is far too serious a matter to be explained in a hurry, Mr. Blake. I am not wilfully trying your patience—I should only be adding to your suspense, if I attempted to relieve it as things are now. At Frizinghall, sir, in two hours' time!"

The man on the high-road hailed him again. He hurried away, and left me.

CHAPTER X.

HOW the interval of suspense to which I was now condemned might have affected other men in my position, I cannot pretend to say. The influence of the two hours' probation upon *my* temperament, was simply this. I felt physically incapable of remaining still in any one place, and morally incapable of speaking to any one human being, until I had first heard all that Ezra Jennings had to say to me.

In this frame of mind, I not only abandoned my contemplated visit to Mrs. Ablewhite—I even shrank from encountering Gabriel Betteredge himself.

Returning to Frizinghall, I left a note for Betteredge, telling him that I had been unexpectedly called away, for a few hours, but that he might certainly expect me to return towards three o'clock in the afternoon. I requested him, in the

interval, to order his dinner at the usual hour, and to amuse himself as he pleased. He had, as I well knew, hosts of friends in Frizinghall; and he would be at no loss how to fill up his time until I returned to the hotel.

This done, I made the best of my way out of the town again, and roamed the lonely moorland country which surrounds Frizinghall, until my watch told me that it was time, at last, to return to Mr. Candy's house.

I found Ezra Jennings, ready and waiting for me.

He was sitting alone in a bare little room, which communicated by a glazed door with a surgery. Hideous coloured diagrams of the ravages of hideous diseases, decorated the barren buff-coloured walls. A book-case filled with dingy medical works, and ornamented at the top with a skull, in place of the customary bust; a large deal table copiously splashed with ink; wooden chairs of the sort that are seen in kitchens and cottages; a threadbare drugget in the middle of the floor; a sink of water, with a basin and waste-pipe roughly let into the wall, horribly suggestive of its connexion with surgical operations—comprised the entire furniture of the room. The bees were humming among a few flowers placed in pots outside the window; the birds were singing in the garden;

and the faint intermittent jingle of a tuneless piano in some neighbouring house, forced itself now and again, on the ear. In any other place, these everyday sounds might have spoken pleasantly of the everyday world outside. Here, they came in as intruders on a silence which nothing but human suffering had the privilege to disturb. I looked at the mahogany instrument case, and at the huge roll of lint, occupying places of their own on the bookshelves, and shuddered inwardly as I thought of the sounds, familiar and appropriate to the everyday use of Ezra Jennings's room.

"I make no apology, Mr. Blake, for the place in which I am receiving you," he said. "It is the only room in the house, at this hour of the day, in which we can feel quite sure of being left undisturbed. Here are my papers ready for you; and here are two books to which we may have occasion to refer, before we have done. Bring your chair to the table, and we shall be able to consult them together."

I drew up to the table; and Ezra Jennings handed me his manuscript notes. They consisted of two large folio leaves of paper. One leaf contained writing which only covered the surface at intervals. The other presented writing, in red and black ink, which completely filled the page from top to bot-

tom. In the irritated state of my curiosity, at that moment, I laid aside the second sheet of paper in despair.

"Have some mercy on me!" I said. "Tell me what I am to expect, before I attempt to read this."

"Willingly, Mr. Blake! Do you mind my asking you one or two more questions?"

"Ask me anything you like!"

He looked at me with the sad smile on his lips, and the kindly interest in his soft brown eyes.

"You have already told me," he said, "that you have never—to your knowledge—tasted opium in your life."

"To my knowledge?" I repeated.

"You will understand directly, why I speak with that reservation. Let us go on. You are not aware of ever having taken opium. At this time, last year, you were suffering from nervous irritation, and you slept wretchedly at night. On the night of the birthday, however, there was an exception to the rule—you slept soundly. Am I right, so far?"

"Quite right."

"Can you assign any cause for your nervous suffering, and your want of sleep?"

"I can assign no cause. Old Betteredge made

a guess at the cause, I remember. But that is hardly worth mentioning."

"Pardon me. Anything is worth mentioning in such a case as this. Betteredge attributed your sleeplessness to something. To what?"

"To my leaving off smoking."

"Had you been an habitual smoker?"

"Yes."

"Did you leave off the habit suddenly?"

"Yes."

"Betteredge was perfectly right, Mr. Blake. When smoking is a habit, a man must have no common constitution who can leave it off suddenly without some temporary damage to his nervous system. Your sleepless nights are accounted for, to my mind. My next question refers to Mr. Candy. Do you remember having entered into anything like a dispute with him—at the birthday dinner, or afterwards—on the subject of his profession?"

The question instantly awakened one of my dormant remembrances, in connexion with the birthday festival. The foolish wrangle which took place, on that occasion, between Mr. Candy and myself, will be found, described at much greater length than it deserves, in the tenth chapter of Betteredge's Narrative. The details there presented of the dispute—so little had I thought of it after-

wards—entirely failed to recur to my memory. All that I could now recal, and all that I could tell Ezra Jennings was, that I had attacked the art of medicine at the dinner-table, with sufficient rashness and sufficient pertinacity to put even Mr. Candy out of temper for the moment. I also remembered that Lady Verinder had interfered to stop the dispute, and that the little doctor and I had "made it up again," as the children say, and had become as good friends as ever, before we shook hands that night.

"There is one thing more," said Ezra Jennings, "which it is very important I should know. Had you any reason for feeling any special anxiety about the Diamond, at this time last year?"

"I had the strongest reasons for feeling anxiety about the Diamond. I knew it to be the object of a conspiracy; and I was warned to take measures for Miss Verinder's protection, as the possessor of the stone."

"Was the safety of the Diamond the subject of conversation between you and any other person, immediately before you retired to rest on the birthday night?"

"It was the subject of a conversation, between Lady Verinder and her daughter——"

"Which took place in your hearing?"

"Yes."

Ezra Jennings took up his notes from the table, and placed them in my hands.

"Mr. Blake," he said, "if you read those notes now, by the light which my questions and your answers have thrown on them, you will make two astounding discoveries, concerning yourself. You will find:—First, that you entered Miss Verinder's sitting-room and took the Diamond, in a state of trance, produced by opium. Secondly, that the opium was given to you by Mr. Candy—without your own knowledge—as a practical refutation of the opinions which you had expressed to him at the birthday dinner."

I sat, with the papers in my hand, completely stupified.

"Try, and forgive poor Mr. Candy," said the assistant gently. "He has done dreadful mischief, I own; but he has done it innocently. If you will look at the notes, you will see that—but for his illness—he would have returned to Lady Verinder's the morning after the party, and would have acknowledged the trick that he had played you. Miss Verinder would have heard of it, and Miss Verinder would have questioned him—and the truth which has laid hidden for a year, would have been discovered in a day."

I began to regain my self-possession. "Mr. Candy is beyond the reach of my resentment," I said angrily. "But the trick that he played me is not the less an act of treachery, for all that. I may forgive, but I shall not forget it."

"Every medical man commits that act of treachery, Mr. Blake, in the course of his practice. The ignorant distrust of opium (in England) is by no means confined to the lower and less cultivated classes. Every doctor in large practice finds himself, every now and then, obliged to deceive his patients, as Mr. Candy deceived you. I don't defend the folly of playing you a trick under the circumstances. I only plead with you for a more accurate and more merciful construction of motives."

"How was it done?" I asked. "Who gave me the laudanum, without my knowing it myself?"

"I am not able to tell you. Nothing relating to that part of the matter dropped from Mr. Candy's lips, all through his illness. Perhaps, your own memory may point to the person to be suspected?"

"No."

"It is useless, in that case, to pursue the inquiry. The laudanum was secretly given to you in some way. Let us leave it there, and go on to matters

of more immediate importance. Read my notes, if you can. Familiarise your mind with what has happened in the past. I have something very bold and very startling to propose to you, which relates to the future."

Those last words roused me.

I looked at the papers, in the order in which Ezra Jennings had placed them in my hands. The paper which contained the smaller quantity of writing was the uppermost of the two. On this, the disconnected words, and fragments of sentences, which had dropped from Mr. Candy in his delirium, appeared as follows:

"... Mr. Franklin Blake ... and agreeable .... down a peg .... medicine .... confesses ... sleep at night ... tell him ... out of order ... medicine ... he tells me ... and groping in the dark mean one and the same thing ... all the company at the dinner-table ... I say ... groping after sleep ... nothing but medicine ... he says ... leading the blind ; ... know what it means .. witty ... a night's rest in spite of his teeth ... wants sleep ... Lady Verinder's medicine chest ... five-and-twenty minims ... without his knowing it ... to-morrow morning ... Well, Mr. Blake ... medicine to-day ... never ... without it ... out, Mr. Candy ... excellent ...

without it . . . down on him . . . truth . . . something besides . . . excellent . . . dose of laudanum, sir . . . bed . . . what . . . medicine now."

There, the first of the two sheets of paper came to an end. I handed it back to Ezra Jennings.

"That is what you heard at his bed-side?" I said.

"Literally and exactly what I heard," he answered—"except that the repetitions are not transferred here from my short-hand notes. He reiterated certain words and phrases a dozen times over, fifty times over, just as he attached more or less importance to the idea which they represented. The repetitions, in this sense, were of some assistance to me in putting together those fragments. Don't suppose," he added, pointing to the second sheet of paper, "that I claim to have reproduced the expressions which Mr. Candy himself would have used if he had been capable of speaking connectedly. I only say that I have penetrated through the obstacle of the disconnected expression, to the thought which was underlying it connectedly, all the time. Judge for yourself."

I turned to the second sheet of paper, which I now knew to be the key to the first.

Once more, Mr. Candy's wanderings appeared, copied in black ink; the intervals between the

phrases being filled up by Ezra Jennings in red ink. I reproduce the result here, in one plain form; the original language and the intepretation of it coming close enough together in these pages to be easily compared and verified.

". . . Mr. Franklin Blake is clever and agreeable, but he wants taking down a peg when he talks of medicine. He confesses that he has been suffering from want of sleep at night. I tell him that his nerves are out of order, and that he ought to take medicine. He tells me that taking medicine and groping in the dark mean one and the same thing. This before all the company at the dinner-table. I say to him, you are groping after sleep, and nothing but medicine can help you to find it. He says to me, I have heard of the blind leading the blind, and now I know what it means. Witty—but I can give him a night's rest in spite of his teeth. He really wants sleep; and Lady Verinder's medicine chest is at my disposal. Give him five-and-twenty minims of laudanum to-night, without his knowing it; and then call to-morrow morning. 'Well, Mr. Blake, will you try a little medicine to-day? You will never sleep without it.'—'There you are out, Mr. Candy: I have had an excellent night's rest without it.' Then, come down on him with the truth! 'You have had

something besides an excellent night's rest; you had a dose of laudanum, sir, before you went to bed. What do you say to the art of medicine, now?' "

Admiration of the ingenuity which had woven this smooth and finished texture out of the ravelled skein, was naturally the first impression that I felt, on handing the manuscript back to Ezra Jennings. He modestly interrupted the first few words in which my sense of surprise expressed myself, by asking me if the conclusion which he had drawn from his notes was also the conclusion at which my own mind had arrived.

"Do you believe as I believe," he said, "that you were acting under the influence of the laudanum in doing all that you did, on the night of Miss Verinder's birthday, in Lady Verinder's house?"

"I am too ignorant of the influence of laudanum to have an opinion of my own," I answered. "I can only follow your opinion, and feel convinced that you are right."

"Very well. The next question is this. You are convinced; and I am convinced—how are we to carry our conviction to the minds of other people?"

I pointed to the two manuscripts, lying on the table between us. Ezra Jennings shook his head.

"Useless, Mr. Blake! Quite useless, as they stand now, for three unanswerable reasons. In the first place, those notes have been taken, under circumstances entirely out of the experience of the mass of mankind. Against them, to begin with! In the second place, those notes represent a medical and metaphysical theory. Against them, once more! In the third place, those notes are of *my* making; there is nothing but *my* assertion to the contrary, to guarantee that they are not fabrications. Remember what I told you on the moor —and ask yourself what my assertion is worth. No! my notes have but one value, looking to the verdict of the world outside. Your innocence is to be vindicated; and they show how it can be done. We must put our conviction to the proof—and You are the man to prove it?"

"How?" I asked.

He leaned eagerly nearer to me across the table that divided us.

"Are you willing to try a bold experiment?"

"I will do anything to clear myself of the suspicion that rests on me now."

"Will you submit to some personal inconvenience for a time.

"To any inconvenience, no matter what it may be."

"Will you be guided implicitly by my advice? It may expose you to the ridicule of fools; it may subject you to the remonstrances of friends whose opinions you are bound to respect——"

"Tell me what to do!" I broke out impatiently. "And, come what may, I'll do it."

"You shall do this, Mr. Blake," he answered. "You shall steal the Diamond, unconsciously, for the second time, in the presence of witnesses whose testimony is beyond dispute?"

I started to my feet. I tried to speak. I could only look at him.

"I believe it *can* be done," he went on. "And it *shall* be done—if you will only help me. Try to compose yourself—sit down, and hear what I have to say to you. You have resumed the habit of smoking; I have seen that for myself. How long have you resumed it?"

"For nearly a year."

"Do you smoke more, or less, than you did?"

"More."

"Will you give up the habit again? Suddenly, mind!—as you gave it up before."

I began dimly to see his drift. "I will give it up, from this moment," I answered.

"If the same consequences follow, which followed last June," said Ezra Jennings—"if you

suffer once more as you suffered then, from sleepless nights, we shall have gained our first step. We shall have put you back again into something assimilating to your nervous condition on the birthday night. If we can next revive, or nearly revive, the domestic circumstances which surrounded you; and if we can occupy your mind again with the various questions concerning the Diamond which formerly agitated it, we shall have replaced you, as nearly as possible, in the same position, physically and morally, in which the opium found you last year. In that case we may fairly hope that a repetition of the dose will lead, in a greater or lesser degree, to a repetition of the result. There is my proposal, expressed in a few hasty words. You shall now see what reasons I have to justify me in making it."

He turned to one of the books at his side, and opened it at a place marked by a small slip of paper.

"Don't suppose that I am going to weary you with a lecture on physiology," he said. "I think myself bound to prove, in justice to both of us, that I am not asking you to try this experiment in deference to any theory of my own devising. Admitted principles, and recognised authorities, justify me in the view that I take. Give me five minutes

of your attention; and I will undertake to show you that Science sanctions my proposal, fanciful as it may seem. Here, in the first place, is the physiological principle on which I am acting, stated by no less a person than Dr. Carpenter. Read it for yourself."

He handed me the slip of paper which had marked the place in the book. It contained a few lines of writing, as follows:—

"There seems much ground for the belief, that *every* sensory impression which has once been recognised by the perceptive consciousness, is registered (so to speak) in the brain, and may be reproduced at some subsequent time, although there may be no consciousness of its existence in the mind during the whole intermediate period."

"Is that plain, so far?" asked Ezra Jennings.

"Perfectly plain."

He pushed the open book across the table to me, and pointed to a passage, marked by pencil lines.

"Now," he said, "read that account of a case, which has—as I believe—a direct bearing on your own position, and on the experiment which I am tempting you to try. Observe, Mr. Blake, before you begin, that I am now referring you to one of the greatest of English physiologists. The book in

your hand is Doctor Elliotson's Human Physiology; and the case which the doctor cites, rests on the well-known authority of Mr. Combe."

The passage pointed out to me, was expressed in these terms:—

"Dr. Abel informed me," says Mr. Combe, "of an Irish porter to a warehouse, who forgot, when sober, what he had done when drunk; but, being drunk, again recollected the transactions of his former state of intoxication. On one occasion, being drunk, he had lost a parcel of some value, and in his sober moments could give no account of it. Next time he was intoxicated, he recollected that he had left the parcel at a certain house, and there being no address on it, it had remained there safely, and was got on his calling for it."

"Plain again?" asked Ezra Jennings.

"As plain as need be."

He put back the slip of paper in its place, and closed the book.

"Are you satisfied that I have not spoken without good authority to support me?" he asked. "If not, I have only to go to those bookshelves, and you have only to read the passages which I can point out to you."

"I am quite satisfied," I said, "without reading a word more."

"In that case, we may return to your own personal interest in this matter. I am bound to tell you that there is something to be said against the experiment as well as for it. If we could, this year, exactly reproduce, in your case, the conditions as they existed last year, it is physiologically certain that we should arrive at exactly the same result. But this—there is no denying it—is simply impossible. We can only hope to approximate to the conditions; and if we don't succeed in getting you nearly enough back to what you were, this venture of ours will fail. If we do succeed—and I am myself hopeful of success—you may at least so far repeat your proceedings on the birthday night, as to satisfy any reasonable person that you are guiltless, morally speaking, of the theft of the Diamond. I believe, Mr. Blake, I have now stated the question, on both sides of it, as fairly as I can, within the limits that I have imposed on myself. If there is anything that I have not made clear to you, tell me what it is—and if I can enlighten you, I will."

"All that you have explained to me," I said, "I understand perfectly. But I own I am puzzled on one point, which you have not made clear to me yet."

"What is the point?"

"I don't understand the effect of the laudanum on me. I don't understand my walking downstairs, and along corridors, and my opening and shutting the drawers of a cabinet, and my going back again to my own room. All these are active proceedings. I thought the influence of opium was first to stupify you, and then to send you to sleep."

"The common error about opium, Mr. Blake! I am, at this moment, exerting my intelligence (such as it is) in your service, under the influence of a dose of laudanum, some ten times larger than the dose Mr. Candy administered to you. But don't trust to my authority—even on a question which comes within my own personal experience. I anticipated the objection you have just made: and I have again provided myself with independent testimony, which will carry its due weight with it in your own mind, and in the minds of your friends."

He handed me the second of the two books which he had by him on the table.

"There," he said, "are the far-famed 'Confessions of an English Opium Eater'! Take the book away with you, and read it. At the passage which I have marked, you will find that when De Quincey had committed what he calls 'a debauch of opium,'

he either went to the gallery at the Opera to enjoy the music, or he wandered about the London markets on Saturday night, and interested himself in observing all the little shifts and bargainings of the poor in providing their Sunday dinners. So much for the capacity of a man to occupy himself actively, and to move about from place to place under the influence of opium."

"I am answered so far," I said; "but I am not answered yet as to the effect produced by the opium on myself."

"I will try to answer you in a few words," said Ezra Jennings. "The action of opium is comprised, in the majority of cases, in two influences—a stimulating influence first, and a sedative influence afterwards. Under the stimulating influence, the latest and most vivid impressions left on your mind—namely, the impressions relating to the Diamond—would be likely, in your morbidly sensitive nervous condition, to become intensified in your brain, and would subordinate to themselves your judgment and your will—exactly as an ordinary dream subordinates to itself your judgment and your will. Little by little, under this action, any apprehensions about the safety of the Diamond which you might have felt during the day, would be liable to develope themselves from the state of doubt to the state of

certainty—would impel you into practical action to preserve the jewel—would direct your steps, with that motive in view, into the room which you entered—and would guide your hand to the drawers of the cabinet, until you had found the drawer which held the stone. In the spiritualised intoxication of opium, you would do all that. Later, as the sedative action began to gain on the stimulant action, you would slowly become inert and stupified. Later still you would fall into a deep sleep. When the morning came, and the effect of the opium had been all slept off, you would wake as absolutely ignorant of what you had done in the night as if you had been living at the Antipodes.—Have I made it tolerably clear to you, so far?"

"You have made it so clear," I said, "that I want you to go farther. You have shown me how I entered the room, and how I came to take the Diamond. But Miss Verinder saw me leave the room again, with the jewel in my hand. Can you trace my proceedings from that moment? Can you guess what I did next?"

"That is the very point I was coming to," he rejoined. "It is a question with me whether the experiment which I propose as a means of vindicating your innocence, may not also be made a means of recovering the lost Diamond as well.

When you left Miss Verinder's sitting room, with the jewel in your hand, you went back in all probability to your own room——"

"Yes? and what then?"

"It is possible, Mr. Blake—I dare not say more—that your idea of preserving the Diamond led, by a natural sequence, to the idea of hiding the Diamond, and that the place in which you hid it was somewhere in your bedroom. In that event, the case of the Irish porter may be your case. You may remember, under the influence of the second dose of opium, the place in which you hid the Diamond under the influence of the first."

It was my turn, now, to enlighten Ezra Jennings. I stopped him, before he could say any more.

"You are speculating," I said, "on a result which cannot possibly take place. The Diamond is, at this moment, in London."

He started, and looked at me in great surprise.

"In London?" he repeated. "How did it get to London from Lady Verinder's house?"

"Nobody knows."

"You removed it with your own hand from Miss Verinder's room. How was it taken out of your keeping?"

"I have no idea how it was taken out of my keeping."

"Did you see it, when you woke in the morning?"

"No."

"Has Miss Verinder recovered possession of it?"

"No."

"Mr. Blake! there seems to be something here which wants clearing up. May I ask how you know that the Diamond is, at this moment, in London?"

I had put precisely the same question to Mr. Bruff, when I made my first inquiries about the Moonstone, on my return to England. In answering Ezra Jennings, I accordingly repeated what I had myself heard from the lawyer's own lips—and what is already familiar to the readers of these pages.

He showed plainly that he was not satisfied with my reply.

"With all deference to you," he said, "and with all deference to your legal adviser, I maintain the opinion which I expressed just now. It rests, I am well aware, on a mere assumption. Pardon me for reminding you, that your opinion also rests on a mere assumption as well."

The view he took of the matter was entirely new to me. I waited anxiously to hear how he would defend it.

"*I* assume," pursued Ezra Jennings, "that the influence of the opium—after impelling you to possess yourself of the Diamond, with the purpose of securing its safety—might also impel you, acting under the same influence and the same motive, to hide it somewhere in your own room. *You* assume that the Hindoo conspirators could by no possibility commit a mistake. The Indians went to Mr. Luker's house after the Diamond—and, therefore, in Mr. Luker's possession the Diamond must be! Have you any evidence to prove that the Moonstone was taken to London at all? You can't even guess how, or by whom, it was removed from Lady Verinder's house! Have you any evidence that the jewel was pledged to Mr. Luker? He declares that he never heard of the Moonstone; and his banker's receipt acknowledges nothing but the deposit of a valuable of great price. The Indians assume that Mr. Luker is lying—and you assume again that the Indians are right. All I say, in defence of my view is—that it is possible. What more, Mr. Blake, either logically or legally, can be said for yours?"

It was put strongly; but there was no denying that it was put truly as well.

"I confess you stagger me," I replied. "Do you object to my writing to Mr. Bruff, and telling him what you have said?"

"On the contrary, I shall be glad if you will write to Mr. Bruff. If we consult his experience, we may see the matter under a new light. For the present, let us return to our experiment with the opium. We have decided that you leave off the habit of smoking, from this moment?"

"From this moment."

"That is the first step. The next step is to reproduce, as nearly as we can, the domestic circumstances which surrounded you last year."

How was this to be done? Lady Verinder was dead. Rachel and I, so long as the suspicion of theft rested on me, were parted irrevocably. Godfrey Ablewhite was away, travelling on the Continent. It was simply impossible to reassemble the people who had inhabited the house, when I had slept in it last. The statement of this objection did not appear to embarrass Ezra Jennings. He attached very little importance, he said, to reassembling the same people—seeing that it would be vain to expect them to reassume the various positions which they had occupied towards me in the past time. On the other hand, he considered it essential to the success of the experiment, that I should see the same objects about me which had surrounded me when I was last in the house.

"Above all things," he said, "you must sleep in

the room which you slept in, on the birthday night, and it must be furnished in the same way. The stairs, the corridors, and Miss Verinder's sitting-room, must also be restored to what they were when you saw them last. It is absolutely necessary, Mr. Blake, to replace every article of furniture in that part of the house which may now be put away. The sacrifice of your cigars will be useless, unless we can get Miss Verinder's permission to do that."

"Who is to apply to her for permission?" I asked.

"Is it not possible for *you* to apply?"

"Quite out of the question. After what has passed between us, on the subject of the lost Diamond, I can neither see her, nor write to her, as things are now."

Ezra Jennings paused, and considered for a moment.

"May I ask you a delicate question?" he said.

I signed to him to go on.

"Am I right, Mr. Blake, in fancying (from one or two things which have dropped from you) that you felt no common interest in Miss Verinder, in former times?"

"Quite right."

"Was the feeling returned?"

"It was."

"Do you think Miss Verinder would be likely to feel a strong interest in the attempt to prove your innocence?"

"I am certain of it."

"In that case, *I* will write to Miss Verinder—if you will give me leave."

"Telling her of the proposal that you have made to me?"

"Telling her of everything that has passed between us to-day."

It is needless to say that I eagerly accepted the service which he had offered to me.

"I shall have time to write by to-day's post," he said, looking at his watch. "Don't forget to lock up your cigars, when you get back to the hotel! I will call to-morrow morning and hear how you have passed the night."

I rose to take leave of him; and attempted to express the grateful sense of his kindness which I really felt.

He pressed my hand gently. "Remember what I told you on the moor," he answered. "If I can do you this little service, Mr. Blake, I shall feel it like a last gleam of sunshine, falling on the evening of a long and clouded day."

We parted. It was then the fifteenth of June.

The events of the next ten days—every one of them more or less directly connected with the experiment of which I was the passive object—are all placed on record, exactly as they happened, in the Journal habitually kept by Mr. Candy's assistant. In the pages of Ezra Jennings, nothing is concealed, and nothing is forgotten. Let Ezra Jennings tell how the venture with the opium was tried, and how it ended.

FOURTH NARRATIVE.

Extracted from the Journal of Ezra Jennings.

1849.—June 15th. . . . With some interruption from patients, and some interruption from pain, I finished my letter to Miss Verinder in time for to-day's post. I failed to make it as short a letter as I could have wished. But I think I have made it plain. It leaves her entirely mistress of her own decision. If she consents to assist the experiment, she consents of her own free will, and not as a favour to Mr. Franklin Blake or to me.

June 16th.—Rose late, after a dreadful night; the vengeance of yesterday's opium, pursuing me through a series of frightful dreams. At one time, I was whirling through empty space with the phantoms of the dead, friends and enemies together. At another, the one beloved face which I shall never

see again, rose at my bedside, hideously phosphorescent in the black darkness, and glared and grinned at me. A slight return of the old pain, at the usual time in the early morning, was welcome as a change. It dispelled the visions—and it was bearable because it did that.

My bad night made it late in the morning, before I could get to Mr. Franklin Blake. I found him stretched on the sofa, breakfasting on brandy and soda water, and a dry biscuit.

"I am beginning, as well as you could possibly wish," he said. "A miserable, restless night; and a total failure of appetite this morning. Exactly what happened last year, when I gave up my cigars. The sooner I am ready for my second dose of laudanum, the better I shall be pleased."

"You shall have it on the earliest possible day," I answered. "In the meantime, we must be as careful of your health as we can. If we allow you to become exhausted, we shall fail in that way. You must get an appetite for your dinner. In other words, you must get a ride or a walk this morning, in the fresh air."

"I will ride, if they can find me a horse here. By-the-bye, I wrote to Mr. Bruff yesterday. Have you written to Miss Verinder?"

"Yes—by last night's post."

"Very good. We shall have some news worth hearing, to tell each other to-morrow. Don't go yet! I have a word to say to you. You appeared to think, yesterday, that our experiment with the opium was not likely to be viewed very favourably by some of my friends. You were quite right. I call old Gabriel Betteredge one of my friends; and you will be amused to hear that he protested strongly when I saw him yesterday. 'You have done a wonderful number of foolish things in the course of your life, Mr. Franklin; but this tops them all!' There is Betteredge's opinion! You will make allowance for his prejudices, I am sure, if you and he happen to meet?"

I left Mr. Blake, to go my rounds among my patients; feeling the better and the happier even for the short interview that I had had with him.

What is the secret of the attraction that there is for me in this man? Does it only mean that I feel the contrast between the frankly kind manner in which he has allowed me to become acquainted with him, and the merciless dislike and distrust with which I am met by other people? Or is there really something in him which answers to the yearning that I have for a little human sympathy—the yearning, which has survived the solitude and per-

secution of many years; which seems to grow keener and keener, as the time comes nearer and nearer when I shall endure and feel no more? How useless to ask these questions! Mr. Blake has given me a new interest in life. Let that be enough, without seeking to know what the new interest is.

June 17th.—Before breakfast, this morning, Mr. Candy informed me that he was going away for a fortnight, on a visit to a friend in the south of England. He gave me as many special directions, poor fellow, about the patients, as if he still had the large practice which he possessed before he was taken ill. The practice is worth little enough now! Other doctors have superseded *him;* and nobody who can help it will employ *me*.

It is perhaps fortunate that he is to be away just at this time. He would have been mortified if I had not informed him of the experiment which I am going to try with Mr. Blake. And I hardly know what undesirable results might not have happened, if I had taken him into my confidence. Better as it is. Unquestionably, better as it is.

The post brought me Miss Verinder's answer, after Mr. Candy had left the house.

A charming letter! It gives me the highest

opinion of her. There is no attempt to conceal the interest that she feels in our proceedings. She tells me, in the prettiest manner, that my letter has satisfied her of Mr. Blake's innocence, without the slightest need (so far as she is concerned) of putting my assertion to the proof. She even upbraids herself—most undeservedly, poor thing!—for not having divined at the time what the true solution of the mystery might really be. The motive underlying all this, proceeds evidently from something more than a generous eagerness to make atonement for a wrong which she has innocently inflicted on another person. It is plain that she has loved him, throughout the estrangement between them. In more than one place, the rapture of discovering that he has deserved to be loved, breaks its way innocently through the stoutest formalities of pen and ink, and even defies the stronger restraint still of writing to a stranger. Is it possible (I ask myself, in reading this delightful letter) that I, of all men in the world, am chosen to be the means of bringing these two young people together again? My own happiness has been trampled under foot; my own love has been torn from me. Shall I live to see a happiness of others, which is of my making—a love renewed, which is of my bringing back? Oh merciful Death, let me see it

before your arms enfold me, before your voice whispers to me, "Rest at last!"

There are two requests contained in the letter. One of them prevents me from showing it to Mr. Franklin Blake. I am authorised to tell him that Miss Verinder willingly consents to place her house at our disposal; and, that said, I am desired to add no more.

So far, it is easy to comply with her wishes. But the second request embarrasses me seriously.

Not content with having written to Mr. Betteredge, instructing him to carry out whatever directions I may have to give, Miss Verinder asks leave to assist me, by personally superintending the restoration of her own sitting-room. She only waits a word of reply from me, to make the journey to Yorkshire, and to be present as one of the witnesses on the night when the opium is tried for the second time.

Here, again, there is a motive under the surface; and, here again, I fancy that I can find it out.

What she has forbidden me to tell Mr. Franklin Blake, she is (as I interpret it) eager to tell him with her own lips, *before* he is put to the test which is to vindicate his character in the eyes of other people. I understand and admire this generous anxiety to acquit him, without waiting until

his innocence may, or may not, be proved. It is the atonement that she is longing to make, poor girl, after having innocently and inevitably wronged him. But the thing cannot be done. I have no sort of doubt that the agitation which a meeting between them would produce on both sides—the old feelings which it would revive, the new hopes which it would awaken—would, in their effect on the mind of Mr. Blake, be almost certainly fatal to the success of our experiment. It is hard enough, as things are, to reproduce in him the conditions as they existed, or nearly as they existed, last year. With new interests and new emotions to agitate him, the attempt would be simply useless.

And yet, knowing this, I cannot find it in my heart to disappoint her. I must try if I can discover some new arrangement, before post-time, which will allow me to say Yes to Miss Verinder, without damage to the service which I have bound myself to render to Mr. Franklin Blake.

Two o'clock.—I have just returned from my round of medical visits; having begun, of course, by calling at the hotel.

Mr. Blake's report of the night is the same as before. He has had some intervals of broken sleep, and no more. But he feels it less to-day, having slept after yesterday's dinner. This after-dinner sleep

is the result, no doubt, of the ride which I advised him to take. I fear I shall have to curtail his restorative exercise in the fresh air. He must not be too well; he must not be too ill. It is a case (as the sailors would say) of very fine steering.

He has not heard yet from Mr. Bruff. I found him eager to know if I had received any answer from Miss Verinder.

I told him exactly what I was permitted to tell, and no more. It was quite needless to invent excuses for not showing him the letter. He told me bitterly enough, poor fellow, that he understood the delicacy which disinclined me to produce it. "She consents, of course, as a matter of common courtesy and common justice," he said. "But she keeps her own opinion of me, and waits to see the result." I was sorely tempted to hint that he was now wronging her as she had wronged him. On reflection, I shrank from forestalling her in the double luxury of surprising and forgiving him.

My visit was a very short one. After the experience of the other night, I have been compelled once more to give up my dose of opium. As a necessary result, the agony of the disease that is in me has got the upper hand again. I felt the attack coming on, and left abruptly, so as not to

alarm or distress him. It only lasted a quarter of an hour this time, and it left me strength enough to go on with my work.

Five o'clock.—I have written my reply to Miss Verinder.

The arrangement I have proposed reconciles the interests on both sides, if she will only consent to it. After first stating the objections that there are to a meeting between Mr. Blake and herself, before the experiment is tried, I have suggested that she should so time her journey as to arrive at the house privately, on the evening when we make the attempt. Travelling by the afternoon train from London, she would delay her arrival until nine o'clock. At that hour, I have undertaken to see Mr. Blake safely into his bedchamber; and so to leave Miss Verinder free to occupy her own rooms until the time comes for administering the laudanum. When that has been done, there can be no objection to her watching the result, with the rest of us. On the next morning, she shall show Mr. Blake (if she likes) her correspondence with me, and shall satisfy him in that way that he was acquitted in her estimation, before the question of his innocence was put to the proof.

In that sense, I have written to her. This is all that I can do to-day. To-morrow I must see

Mr. Betteredge, and give the necessary directions for re-opening the house.

June 18th.—Late again, in calling on Mr. Franklin Blake. More of that horrible pain in the early morning; followed, this time, by complete prostration, for some hours. I foresee, in spite of the penalties which it exacts from me, that I shall have to return to the opium for the hundredth time. If I had only myself to think of, I should prefer the sharp pains to the frightful dreams. But the physical suffering exhausts me. If I let myself sink, it may end in my becoming useless to Mr. Blake at the time when he wants me most.

It was nearly one o'clock, before I could get to the hotel to-day. The visit, even in my shattered condition, proved to be a most amusing one—thanks entirely to the presence on the scene of Gabriel Betteredge.

I found him in the room, when I went in. He withdrew to the window and looked out, while I put my first customary question to my patient. Mr. Blake had slept badly again, and he felt the loss of rest this morning more than he had felt it yet.

I asked next if he had heard from Mr. Bruff.

A letter had reached him that morning Mr. Bruff expressed the strongest disapproval of the

course which his friend and client was taking under my advice. It was mischievous—for it excited hopes that might never be realised. It was quite unintelligible to *his* mind, except that it looked like a piece of trickery, akin to the trickery of mesmerism, clairvoyance, and the like. It unsettled Miss Verinder's house, and it would end in unsettling Miss Verinder herself. He had put the case (without mentioning names) to an eminent physician; and the eminent physician had smiled, had shaken his head, and had said—nothing. On these grounds, Mr. Bruff entered his protest, and left it there.

My next inquiry related to the subject of the Diamond. Had the lawyer produced any evidence to prove that the jewel was in London?

No, the lawyer had simply declined to discuss the question. He was himself satisfied that the Moonstone had been pledged to Mr. Luker. His eminent absent friend, Mr. Murthwaite (whose consummate knowledge of the Indian character no one could deny), was satisfied also. Under these circumstances, and with the many demands already made on him, he must decline entering into any disputes on the subject of evidence. Time would show; and Mr. Bruff was willing to wait for time.

It was quite plain—even if Mr. Blake had not made it plainer still by reporting the substance of the letter, instead of reading what was actually written—that distrust of *me* was at the bottom of all this. Having myself foreseen that result, I was neither mortified nor surprised. I asked Mr. Blake if his friend's protest had shaken him. He answered emphatically, that it had not produced the slightest effect on his mind. I was free after that to dismiss Mr. Bruff from consideration—and I did dismiss him accordingly.

A pause in the talk between us, followed—and Gabriel Betteredge came out from his retirement at the window.

"Can you favour me with your attention, sir?" he inquired, addressing himself to me.

"I am quite at your service," I answered.

Betteredge took a chair and seated himself at the table. He produced a huge old-fashioned leather pocket-book, with a pencil of dimensions to match. Having put on his spectacles, he opened the pocket-book, at a blank page, and addressed himself to me once more.

"I have lived," said Betteredge, looking at me sternly, "nigh on fifty years in the service of my late lady. I was page-boy before that, in the service of the old lord, her father. I am now somewhere

between seventy and eighty years of age—never mind exactly where! I am reckoned to have got as pretty a knowledge and experience of the world as most men. And what does it all end in? It ends, Mr. Ezra Jennings, in a conjuring trick being performed on Mr. Franklin Blake, by a doctor's assistant with a bottle of laudanum—and by the living jingo, I'm appointed, in my old age, to be conjuror's boy!"

Mr. Blake burst out laughing. I attempted to speak. Betteredge held up his hand, in token that he had not done yet.

"Not a word, Mr. Jennings!" he said. "It don't want a word, sir, from you. I have got my principles, thank God. If an order comes to me, which is own brother to an order come from Bedlam, it don't matter. So long as I get it from my master or mistress, as the case may be, I obey it. I may have my own opinion, which is also, you will please to remember, the opinion of Mr. Bruff—the Great Mr. Bruff!" said Betteredge, raising his voice, and shaking his head at me solemnly. "It don't matter; I withdraw my opinion, for all that. My young lady says, 'Do it.' And I say, 'Miss, it shall be done.' Here I am, with my book and my pencil—the latter not pointed so well as I could wish, but when Christians take leave of their senses,

who is to expect that pencils will keep their points? Give me your orders, Mr. Jennings. I'll have them in writing, sir. I'm determined not to be behind 'em, or before 'em, by so much as a hair's-breadth. I'm a blind agent—that's what I am. A blind agent!" repeated Betteredge, with infinite relish of his own description of himself.

"I am very sorry," I began, "that you and I don't agree——"

"Don't bring *me*, into it!" interposed Betteredge. "This is not a matter of agreement, it's a matter of obedience. Issue your directions, sir—issue your directions!"

Mr. Blake made me a sign to take him at his word. I "issued my directions" as plainly and as gravely as I could.

"I wish certain parts of the house to be re-opened," I said, "and to be furnished, exactly as they were furnished at this time last year."

Betteredge gave his imperfectly-pointed pencil a preliminary lick with his tongue. "Name the parts, Mr. Jennings!" he said loftily.

"First, the inner hall, leading to the chief staircase."

"'First, the inner hall,' Betteredge wrote. "Impossible to furnish that, sir, as it was furnished last year—to begin with."

"Why?"

"Because there was a stuffed buzzard, Mr. Jennings, in the hall last year. When the family left, the buzzard was put away with the other things. When the buzzard was put away—he burst."

"We will except the buzzard then."

Betteredge took a note of the exception. "'The inner hall to be furnished again, as furnished last year. A burst buzzard alone excepted.' Please to go on, Mr. Jennings."

"The carpet to be laid down on the stairs, as before."

"'The carpet to be laid down on the stairs, as before.' Sorry to disappoint you, sir. But that can't be done either."

"Why not?"

"Because the man who laid that carpet down, is dead, Mr. Jennings—and the like of him for reconciling together a carpet and a corner, is not to be found in all England, look where you may."

"Very well. We must try the next best man in England."

Betteredge took another note; and I went on issuing my directions.

"Miss Verinder's sitting-room to be restored exactly to what it was last year. Also, the corridor leading from the sitting-room to the first landing.

Also, the second corridor, leading from the second landing to the best bedrooms. Also, the bedroom occupied last June by Mr. Franklin Blake."

Betteredge's blunt pencil followed me conscientiously, word by word. "Go on, sir," he said, with sardonic gravity. "There's a deal of writing left in the point of this pencil yet."

I told him that I had no more directions to give. "Sir," said Betteredge, "in that case, I have a point or two to put on my own behalf." He opened the pocket-book at a new page, and gave the inexhaustible pencil another preliminary lick.

"I wish to know," he began, "whether I may, or may not, wash my hands——"

"You may decidedly," said Mr. Blake. "I'll ring for the waiter."

"—— of certain responsibilities," pursued Betteredge, impenetrably declining to see anybody in the room but himself and me. "As to Miss Verinder's sitting-room, to begin with. When we took up the carpet last year, Mr. Jennings, we found a surprising quantity of pins. Am I responsible for putting back the pins?"

"Certainly not."

Betteredge made a note of that concession, on the spot.

"As to the first corridor next," he resumed.

"When we moved the ornaments in that part, we moved a statue of a fat naked child—profanely described in the catalogue of the house as 'Cupid, god of Love.' He had two wings last year, in the fleshy part of his shoulders. My eye being off him, for the moment, he lost one of them. Am I responsible for Cupid's wing?"

I made another concession, and Betteredge made another note.

"As to the second corridor," he went on. "There having been nothing in it, last year, but the doors of the rooms (to everyone of which I can swear, if necessary), my mind is easy, I admit, respecting that part of the house only. But, as to Mr. Franklin's bed-room (if *that* is to be put back to what it was before), I want to know who is responsible for keeping it in a perpetual state of litter, no matter how often it may be set right—his trousers here, his towels there, and his French novels everywhere. I say, who is responsible for untidying the tidiness of Mr. Franklin's room, him or me?"

Mr. Blake declared that he would assume the whole responsibility with the greatest pleasure. Betteredge obstinately declined to listen to any solution of the difficulty, without first referring it to my sanction and approval. I accepted Mr.

Blake's proposal; and Betteredge made a last entry in the pocket-book to that effect.

"Look in when you like, Mr. Jennings, beginning from to-morrow," he said, getting on his legs. "You will find me at work, with the necessary persons to assist me. I respectfully beg to thank you, sir, for overlooking the case of the stuffed buzzard, and the other case of the Cupid's wing—as also for permitting me to wash my hands of all responsibility in respect of the pins on the carpet, and the litter in Mr. Franklin's room. Speaking as a servant, I am deeply indebted to you. Speaking as a man, I consider you to be a person whose head is full of maggots, and I take up my testimony against your experiment as a delusion and a snare. Don't be afraid, on that account, of my feelings as a man getting in the way of my duty as a servant! You shall be obeyed—the maggots notwithstanding, sir, you shall be obeyed. If it ends in your setting the house on fire, Damme if I send for the engines, unless you ring the bell and order them first!"

With that farewell assurance, he made me a bow, and walked out of the room.

"Do you think we can depend on him?" I asked.

"Implicitly," answered Mr. Blake. "When we

go to the house, we shall find nothing neglected, and nothing forgotten."

June 19th. — Another protest against our contemplated proceedings! From a lady this time.

The morning's post brought me two letters. One, from Miss Verinder, consenting, in the kindest manner, to the arrangement that I have proposed. The other from the lady under whose care she is living—one Mrs. Merridew.

Mrs. Merridew presents her compliments, and does not pretend to understand the subject on which I have been corresponding with Miss Verinder, in its scientific bearings. Viewed in its social bearings, however, she feels free to pronounce an opinion. I am probably, Mrs. Merridew thinks, not aware that Miss Verinder is barely nineteen years of age. To allow a young lady, at her time of life, to be present (without a "chaperone") in a house full of men among whom a medical experiment is being carried on, is an outrage on propriety which Mrs. Merridew cannot possibly permit. If the matter is allow to proceed, she will feel it to be her duty —at a serious sacrifice of her own personal convenience—to accompany Miss Verinder to Yorkshire. Under these circumstances, she ventures to

request that I will kindly reconsider the subject; seeing that Miss Verinder declines to be guided by any opinion but mine. Her presence cannot possibly be necessary; and a word from me, to that effect, would relieve both Mrs. Merridew and myself of a very unpleasant responsibility.

Translated from polite commonplace, into plain English, the meaning of this is, as I take it, that Mrs. Merridew stands in mortal fear of the opinion of the world. She has unfortunately appealed to the very last man in existence who has any reason to regard that opinion with respect. I won't disappoint Miss Verinder; and I won't delay a reconciliation between two young people who love each other, and who have been parted too long already. Translated from plain English into polite commonplace, this means that Mr. Jennings presents his compliments to Mrs. Merridew, and regrets that he cannot feel justified in interfering any farther in the matter.

Mr. Blake's report of himself, this morning, was the same as before. We determined not to disturb Betteredge by overlooking him at the house to-day. To-morrow will be time enough for our first visit of inspection.

June 20th.—Mr. Blake is beginning to feel his

continued restlessness at night. The sooner the rooms are refurnished, now, the better.

On our way to the house, this morning, he consulted me, with some nervous impatience and irresolution, about a letter (forwarded to him from London) which he had received from Sergeant Cuff.

The Sergeant writes from Ireland. He acknowledges the receipt (through his housekeeper) of a card and message which Mr. Blake left at his residence near Dorking, and announces his return to England as likely to take place in a week or less. In the meantime, he requests to be favoured with Mr. Blake's reasons for wishing to speak to him (as stated in the message) on the subject of the Moonstone. If Mr. Blake can convict him of having made any serious mistake, in the course of his last year's inquiry concerning the Diamond, he will consider it a duty (after the liberal manner in which he was treated by the late Lady Verinder) to place himself at that gentleman's disposal. If not, he begs permission to remain in his retirement, surrounded by the peaceful floricultural attractions of a country life.

After reading the letter, I had no hesitation in advising Mr. Blake to inform Sergeant Cuff, in reply, of all that had happened since the inquiry

was suspended last year, and to leave him to draw his own conclusions from the plain facts.

On second thoughts, I also suggested inviting the Sergeant to be present at the experiment, in the event of his returning to England in time to join us. He would be a valuable witness to have, in any case; and, if I proved to be wrong in believing the Diamond to be hidden in Mr. Blake's room, his advice might be of great importance, at a future stage of the proceedings over which I could exercise no control. This last consideration appeared to decide Mr. Blake. He promised to follow my advice.

The sound of the hammer informed us that the work of refurnishing was in full progress, as we entered the drive that led to the house.

Betteredge, attired for the occasion in a fisherman's red cap, and an apron of green baize, met us in the outer hall. The moment he saw me, he pulled out the pocket-book and pencil, and obstinately insisted on taking notes of everything that I said to him. Look where we might, we found, as Mr. Blake had foretold, that the work was advancing as rapidly and as intelligently as it was possible to desire. But there was still much to be done in the inner hall, and in Miss Verinder's room. It seemed doubtful whether

the house would be ready for us before the end of the week.

Having congratulated Betteredge on the progress that he had made (he persisted in taking notes, every time I opened my lips; declining, at the same time, to pay the slightest attention to anything said by Mr. Blake); and having promised to return for a second visit of inspection in a day or two, we prepared to leave the house, going out by the back way. Before we were clear of the passages downstairs, I was stopped by Betteredge, just as I was passing the door which led into his own room.

"Could I say two words to you in private?" he asked, into a mysterious whisper.

I consented of course. Mr. Blake walked on to wait for me in the garden, while I accompanied Betteredge into his room. I fully anticipated a demand for certain new concessions, following the precedent already established in the cases of the stuffed buzzard, and the Cupid's wing. To my great surprise, Betteredge laid his hand confidentially on my arm, and put this extraordinary question to me:

"Mr. Jennings, do you happen to be acquainted with Robinson Crusoe?"

I answered that I had read Robinson Crusoe when I was a child.

"Not since then?" inquired Betteredge.

"Not since then."

He fell back a few steps, and looked at me with an expression of compassionate curiosity, tempered by superstitious awe.

"He has not read Robinson Crusoe since he was a child," said Betteredge, speaking to himself —not to me. "Let's try how Robinson Crusoe strikes him now!"

He unlocked a cupboard in a corner, and produced a dirty and dog's-eared book, which exhaled a strong odour of stale tobacco as he turned over the leaves. Having found a passage of which he was apparently in search, he requested me to join him in the corner; still mysteriously confidential, and still speaking under his breath.

"In respect to this hocus-pocus of yours, sir, with the laudanum and Mr. Franklin Blake," he began. "While the workpeople are in the house, my duty as a servant gets the better of my feelings as a man. When the workpeople are gone, my feelings as a man get the better of my duty as a servant. Very good. Last night, Mr. Jennings, it was borne in powerfully on my mind that this new medical enterprise of yours would end badly. If I had yielded to that secret Dictate, I should have put all the furniture away again with my own

hands, and have warned the workmen off the premises when they came the next morning."

"I am glad to find, from what I have seen up-stairs," I said, "that you resisted the secret Dictate."

"Resisted isn't the word," answered Betteredge. "Wrostled is the word. I wrostled, sir, between the silent orders in my bosom pulling me one way, and the written orders in my pocket-book pushing me the other, until (saving your presence) I was in a cold sweat. In that dreadful perturbation of mind and laxity of body, to what remedy did I apply? To the remedy, sir, which has never failed me yet for the last thirty years and more—to This Book!"

He hit the book a sounding blow with his open hand, and struck out of it a stronger smell of stale tobacco than ever.

"What did I find here," pursued Betteredge, "at the first page I opened? This awful bit, sir, page one hundred and seventy-eight, as follows:—'Upon these, and many like Reflections, I afterwards made it a certain rule with me, That whenever I found those secret Hints or Pressings of my Mind, to doing, or not doing any Thing that presented; or to going this Way, or that Way, I never failed to obey the secret Dictate.'—As I live

by bread, Mr. Jennings, those were the first words that met my eye, exactly at the time when I myself was setting the secret Dictate at defiance! You don't see anything at all out of the common in that, do you, sir?"

"I see a coincidence—nothing more."

"You don't feel at all shaken, Mr. Jennings, in respect to this medical enterprise of yours?"

"Not the least in the world."

Betteredge stared hard at me, in dead silence. He closed the book with great deliberation; he locked it up again in the cupboard with extraordinary care; he wheeled round, and stared hard at me once more. Then he spoke.

"Sir," he said gravely, "there are great allowances to be made for a man who has not read Robinson Crusoe, since he was a child. I wish you good morning.

He opened his door with a low bow, and left me at liberty to find my own way into the garden. I met Mr. Blake returning to the house.

"You needn't tell me what has happened," he said. "Betteredge has played his last card: he has made another prophetic discovery in Robinson Crusoe. Have you humoured his favourite delusion? No? You have let him see that you don't believe in Robinson Crusoe? Mr. Jennings!

you have fallen to the lowest possible place in Betteredge's estimation. Say what you like, and do what you like, for the future. You will find that he won't waste another word on you now."

June 21st.—A short entry must suffice in my journal to-day.

Mr. Blake has had the worst night that he has passed yet. I have been obliged, greatly against my will, to prescribe for him. Men of his sensitive organisation are fortunately quick in feeling the effect of remedial measures. Otherwise, I should be inclined to fear that he will be totally unfit for the experiment, when the time comes to try it.

As for myself, after some little remission of my pains for the last two days, I had an attack this morning, of which I shall say nothing but that it has decided me to return to the opium. I shall close this book, and take my full dose — five hundred drops.

June 22nd.—Our prospects look better to-day. Mr. Blake's nervous suffering is greatly allayed. He slept a little last night. *My* night, thanks to the opium, was the night of a man who is stunned. I can't say that I woke this morning;

the fitter expression would be, that I recovered my senses.

We drove to the house to see if the refurnishing was done. It will be completed to-morrow—Saturday. As Mr. Blake foretold, Betteredge raised no further obstacles. From first to last, he was ominously polite, and ominously silent.

My medical enterprise (as Betteredge calls it) must now, inevitably, be delayed until Monday next. To-morrow evening, the workmen will be late in the house. On the next day, the established Sunday tyranny which is one of the institutions of this free country, so times the trains as to make it impossible to ask anybody to travel to us from London. Until Monday comes, there is nothing to be done but to watch Mr. Blake carefully, and to keep him, if possible, in the same state in which I find him to-day.

In the meanwhile, I have prevailed on him to write to Mr. Bruff, making a point of it that he shall be present as one of the witnesses. I especially choose the lawyer, because he is strongly prejudiced against us. If we convince *him*, we place our victory beyond the possibility of dispute.

Mr. Blake has also written to Sergeant Cuff; and I have sent a line to Miss Verinder. With these, and with old Betteredge (who is really a

person of importance in the family) we shall have witnesses enough for the purpose—without including Mrs. Merridew, if Mrs. Merridew persists in sacrificing herself to the opinion of the world.

June 23rd.—The vengeance of the opium overtook me again last night. No matter; I must go on with it now till Monday is past and gone.

Mr. Blake is not so well again to-day. At two this morning, he confesses that he opened the drawer in which his cigars are put away. He only succeeded in locking it up again by a violent effort. His next proceeding, in case of temptation, was to throw the key out of window. The waiter brought it in this morning, discovered at the bottom of an empty cistern—such is Fate! I have taken possession of the key, until Tuesday next.

June 24th.—Mr. Blake and I took a long drive in an open carriage. We both felt beneficially the blessed influence of the soft summer air. I dined with him at the hotel. To my great relief—for I found him in an over-wrought, over-excited state, this morning—he had two hours' sound sleep on the sofa after dinner. If he has another bad night, now—I am not afraid of the consequences.

June 25th, Monday.—The day of the experiment! It is five o'clock in the afternoon. We have just arrived at the house.

The first and foremost question, is the question of Mr. Blake's health.

So far as it is possible for me to judge, he promises (physically speaking) to be quite as susceptible to the action of the opium to-night, as he was at this time last year. He is, this afternoon, in a state of nervous sensitiveness which just stops short of nervous irritation. He changes colour readily; his hand is not quite steady; and he starts at chance noises, and at unexpected appearances of persons and things.

These results have all been produced by deprivation of sleep, which is in its turn the nervous consequence of a sudden cessation in the habit of smoking, after that habit has been carried to an extreme. Here are the same causes at work again, which operated last year; and here are, apparently, the same effects. Will the parallel still hold good, when the final test has been tried? The events of the night must decide.

While I write these lines, Mr. Blake is amusing himself at the billiard table in the inner hall, practising different strokes in the game, as he was accustomed to practise them when he was a guest

in this house in June last. I have brought my journal here, partly with a view to occupying the idle hours which I am sure to have on my hands between this and to-morrow morning; partly in the hope that something may happen which it may be worth my while to place on record at the time.

Have I omitted anything, thus far? A glance at yesterday's entry shows me that I have forgotten to note the arrival of the morning's post. Let me set this right, before I close these leaves for the present, and join Mr. Blake.

I received a few lines then, yesterday, from Miss Verinder. She has arranged to travel by the afternoon train, as I recommended. Mrs. Merridew has insisted on accompanying her. The note hints that the old lady's generally excellent temper is a little ruffled, and requests all due indulgence for her, in consideration of her age and her habits. I will endeavour, in my relations with Mrs. Merridew, to emulate the moderation which Betteredge displays in his relations with me. He received us to-day, portentously arrayed in his best black suit, and his stiffest white cravat. Whenever he looks my way, he remembers that I have not read Robinson Crusoe since I was a child, and he respectfully pities me.

Yesterday, also, Mr. Blake had the lawyer's

answer. Mr. Bruff accepts the invitation—under protest. It is, he thinks, clearly necessary that a gentleman possessed of the average allowance of common sense, should accompany Miss Verinder to the scene of, what he will venture to call, the proposed exhibition. For want of a better escort, Mr. Bruff himself will be that gentleman.—So here is poor Miss Verinder provided with two "chaperons." It is a relief to think that the opinion of the world must surely be satisfied with this!

Nothing has been heard of Sergeant Cuff. He is no doubt still in Ireland. We must not expect to see him to-night.

Betteredge has just come in, to say that Mr. Blake has asked for me. I must lay down my pen for the present.

* * * * *

Seven o'clock.—We have been all over the refurnished rooms and staircases again; and we have had a pleasant stroll in the shrubbery which was Mr. Blake's favourite walk when he was here last. In this way, I hope to revive the old impressions of places and things as vividly as possible in his mind.

We are now going to dine, exactly at the hour at which the birthday dinner was given last year. My object, of course, is a purely medical one in this case. The laudanum must find the process of

digestion, as nearly as may be, where the laudanum found it last year.

At a reasonable time after dinner, I propose to lead the conversation back again—as inartificially as I can—to the subject of the Diamond, and of the Indian conspiracy to steal it. When I have filled his mind with these topics, I shall have done all that it is in my power to do, before the time comes for giving him the second dose.

* * * * *

Half past eight.—I have only this moment found an opportunity of attending to the most important duty of all; the duty of looking in the family medicine chest, for the laudanum which Mr. Candy used last year.

Ten minutes since, I caught Betteredge at an unoccupied moment, and told him what I wanted. Without a word of objection, without so much as an attempt to produce his pocket-book, he led the way (making allowances for me at every step) to the store-room in which the medicine chest is kept.

I found the bottle, carefully guarded by a glass stopper tied over with leather. The preparation of opium which it contained was, as I had anticipated, the common Tincture of laudanum. Finding the bottle still well filled, I have resolved to use it, in

preference to employing either of the two preparations with which I had taken care to provide myself, in case of emergency.

The question of the quantity which I am to administer, presents certain difficulties. I have thought it over, and have decided on increasing the dose.

My notes inform me that Mr. Candy only administered twenty-five minims. This is a small dose to have produced the results which followed—even in the case of a person so sensitive as Mr. Blake. I think it highly probable that Mr. Candy gave more than he supposed himself to have given—knowing, as I do, that he has a keen relish of the pleasures of the table, and that he measured out the laudanum on the birthday, after dinner. In any case, I shall run the risk of enlarging the dose to forty minims. On this occasion, Mr. Blake knows beforehand that he is going to take the laudanum—which is equivalent, physiologically speaking, to his having (unconsciously to himself) a certain capacity in him to resist the effects. If my view is right, a larger quantity is therefore imperatively required, this time, to repeat the results which the smaller quantity produced, last year.

* * * * *

Ten o'clock.—The witnesses, or the company

(which shall I call them?) reached the house an hour since.

A little before nine o'clock, I prevailed on Mr. Blake to accompany me to his bedroom; stating, as a reason, that I wished him to look round it, for the last time, in order to make quite sure that nothing had been forgotten in the refurnishing of the room. I had previously arranged with Betteredge, that the bedchamber prepared for Mr. Bruff should be the next room to Mr. Blake's, and that I should be informed of the lawyer's arrival by a knock at the door. Five minutes after the clock in the hall had struck nine, I heard the knock; and, going out immediately, met Mr. Bruff in the corridor.

My personal appearance (as usual) told against me. Mr. Bruff's distrust looked at me plainly enough out of Mr. Bruff's eyes. Being well used to producing this effect on strangers, I did not hesitate a moment in saying what I wanted to say, before the lawyer found his way into Mr. Blake's room.

"You have travelled here, I believe, in company with Mrs. Merridew and Miss Verinder?" I said.

"Yes," answered Mr. Bruff, as drily as might be.

"Miss Verinder has probably told you, that I wish her presence in the house (and Mrs. Merridew's

presence of course), to be kept a secret from Mr. Blake, until my experiment on him has been tried first?"

"I know that I am to hold my tongue, sir!" said Mr. Bruff impatiently. "Being habitually silent on the subject of human folly, I am all the readier to keep my lips closed on this occasion. Does that satisfy you?"

I bowed, and left Betteredge to show him to his room. Betteredge gave me one look at parting, which said, as if in so many words, "You have caught a Tartar, Mr. Jennings—and the name of him is Bruff."

It was next necessary to get the meeting over with the two ladies. I descended the stairs—a little nervously, I confess—on my way to Miss Verinder's sitting-room.

The gardener's wife (charged with looking after the accommodation of the ladies) met me in the first floor corridor. This excellent woman treats me with an excessive civility which is plainly the offspring of downright terror. She stares, trembles, and curtseys, whenever I speak to her. On my asking for Miss Verinder, she stared, trembled, and would no doubt have curtseyed next, if Miss Verinder herself had not cut that ceremony short, by suddenly opening her sitting-room door.

"Is that Mr. Jennings?" she asked.

Before I could answer, she came out eagerly to speak to me in the corridor. We met under the light of a lamp on a bracket. At the first sight of me, Miss Verinder stopped, and hesitated. She recovered herself instantly, coloured for a moment —and then, with a charming frankness, offered me her hand.

"I can't treat you like a stranger, Mr. Jennings," she said. "Oh, if you only knew how happy your letters have made me!"

She looked at my ugly wrinkled face, with a bright gratitude so new to me in *my* experience of my fellow-creatures, that I was at a loss how to answer her. Nothing had prepared me for her kindness and her beauty. The misery of many years has not hardened my heart, thank God. I was as awkward and as shy with her, as if I had been a lad in my teens.

"Where is he now?" she asked, giving free expression, to her one dominant interest—the interest in Mr. Blake. "What is he doing? Has he spoken of me? Is he in good spirits? How does he bear the sight of the house, after what happened in it last year? When are you going to give him the laudanum? May I see you pour it out? I am so interested; I am so excited—I have ten

thousand things to say to you, and they all crowd together so that I don't know what to say first. Do you wonder at the interest I take in this?"

"No," I said. "I venture to think that I thoroughly understand it."

She was far above the paltry affectation of being confused. She answered me as she might have answered a brother or a father.

"You have relieved me of indescribable wretchedness; you have given me a new life. How can I be ungrateful enough to have any concealments from *you?* I love him," she said simply, "I have loved him from first to last—even when I was wronging him in my own thoughts; even when I was saying the hardest and the cruellest words to him. Is there any excuse for me, in that? I hope there is—I am afraid it is the only excuse I have. When to-morrow comes, and he knows that I am in the house, do you think——?"

She stopped again, and looked at me very earnestly.

"When to-morrow comes," I said, "I think you have only to tell him what you have just told me."

Her face brightened; she came a step nearer to me. Her fingers trifled nervously with a flower

which I had picked in the garden, and which I had put into the button-hole of my coat.

"You have seen a great deal of him lately," she said. "Have you, really and truly, seen *that?*"

"Really and truly," I answered. "I am quite certain of what will happen to-morrow. I wish I could feel as certain of what will happen to-night."

At that point in the conversation, we were interrupted by the appearance of Betteredge, with the tea-tray. He gave me another significant look as he passed on into the sitting-room. "Aye! aye! make your hay while the sun shines. The Tartar's up-stairs, Mr. Jennings—the Tartar's up-stairs!"

We followed him into the room. A little old lady, in a corner, very nicely dressed, and very deeply absorbed over a smart piece of embroidery, dropped her work in her lap, and uttered a faint little scream at the first sight of my gipsy complexion and my piebald hair.

"Mrs. Merridew," said Miss Verinder, "this is Mr. Jennings."

"I beg Mr. Jennings's pardon," said the old lady, looking at Miss Verinder, and speaking at *me*. "Railway travelling always makes me nervous. I am endeavouring to quiet my mind by occupying myself as usual. I don't know whether my embroidery is out of place, on this extraordinary

occasion. If it interferes with Mr. Jennings's medical views, I shall be happy to put it away of course."

I hastened to sanction the presence of the embroidery, exactly as I had sanctioned the absence of the burst buzzard and the Cupid's wing. Mrs. Merridew made an effort—a grateful effort—to look at my hair. No! it was not to be done. Mrs. Merridew looked back again at Miss Verinder.

"If Mr. Jennings will permit me," pursued the old lady, "I should like to ask a favour. Mr. Jennings is about to try a scientific experiment to-night. I used to attend scientific experiments when I was a girl at school. They invariably ended in an explosion. If Mr. Jennings will be so very kind, I should like to be warned of the explosion this time. With a view to getting it over, if possible, before I go to bed."

I attempted to assure Mrs. Merridew that an explosion was not included in the programme on this occasion.

"No," said the old lady. "I am much obliged to Mr. Jennings—I am aware that he is only deceiving me for my own good. I prefer plain dealing. I am quite resigned to the explosion—but I *do* want to get it over, if possible, before I go to bed."

Here the door opened, and Mrs. Merridew uttered another little scream. The advent of the explosion? No: only the advent of Betteredge.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Jennings," said Betteredge, in his most elaborately confidential manner. "Mr. Franklin wishes to know where you are. Being under your orders to deceive him, in respect to the presence of my young lady in the house, I have said I don't know. That you will please to observe, was a lie. Having one foot already in the grave, sir, the fewer lies you expect me to tell, the more I shall be indebted to you, when my conscience pricks me and my time comes."

There was not a moment to be wasted on the purely speculative question of Betteredge's conscience. Mr. Blake might make his appearance in search of me, unless I went to him at once in his own room. Miss Verinder followed me out into the corridor.

"They seem to be in a conspiracy to persecute you," she said. "What does it mean?"

"Only the protest of the world, Miss Verinder —on a very small scale—against anything that is new."

"What are we to do with Mrs. Merridew?"

"Tell her the explosion will take place at nine to-morrow morning."

"So as to send her to bed?"

"Yes—so as to send her to bed."

Miss Verinder went back to the sitting-room, and I went upstairs to Mr. Blake.

To my surprise, I found him alone; restlessly pacing his room, and a little irritated at being left by himself.

"Where is Mr. Bruff?" I asked.

He pointed to the closed door of communication between the two rooms. Mr. Bruff had looked in on him, for a moment; had attempted to renew his protest against our proceedings; and had once more failed to produce the smallest impression on Mr. Blake. Upon this, the lawyer had taken refuge in a black leather bag, filled to bursting with professional papers. "The serious business of life," he admitted, "was sadly out of place on such an occasion as the present. But the serious business of life must be carried on, for all that. Mr. Blake would perhaps kindly make allowance for the old-fashioned habits of a practical man. Time was money—and, as for Mr. Jennings, he might depend on it that Mr. Bruff would be forthcoming when called upon." With that apology, the lawyer had gone back to his own room, and had immersed himself obstinately in his black bag.

I thought of Mrs. Merridew and her embroidery,

and of Betteredge and his conscience. There is a wonderful sameness in the solid side of the English character—just as there is a wonderful sameness in the solid expression of the English face.

"When are you going to give me the laudanum?" asked Mr. Blake impatiently.

"You must wait a little longer," I said. "I will stay and keep you company till the time comes."

It was then not ten o'clock. Inquiries which I had made, at various times, of Betteredge and Mr. Blake, had led me to the conclusion that the dose of laudanum given by Mr. Candy could not possibly have been administered before eleven. I had accordingly determined not to try the second dose until that time.

We talked a little; but both our minds were preoccupied by the coming ordeal. The conversation soon flagged—then dropped altogether. Mr. Blake idly turned over the books on his bedroom table. I had taken the precaution of looking at them, when we first entered the room. The Guardian; the Tatler; Richardson's Pamela, Mackenzie's Man of Feeling; Roscoe's Lorenzo de' Medici, and Robertson's Charles the Fifth—all classical works; all (of course) immeasurably superior to anything produced in later times; and all (from my present point of view) possessing the one great merit of

enchaining nobody's interest, and exciting nobody's brain. I left Mr. Blake to the composing influence of Standard Literature, and occupied myself in making this entry in my journal.

My watch informs me that it is close on eleven o'clock. I must shut up these leaves once more.

* * * * *

Two o'clock A.M.—The experiment has been tried. With what result, I am now to describe.

At eleven o'clock, I rang the bell for Betteredge, and told Mr. Blake that he might at last prepare himself for bed.

I looked out of window at the night. It was mild and rainy, resembling, in this respect, the night of the birthday—the twenty-first of June, last year. Without professing to believe in omens, it was at least encouraging to find no direct nervous influences —no stormy or electric perturbations—in the atmosphere. Betteredge joined me at the window, and mysteriously put a little slip of paper into my hand. It contained these lines:

"Mrs. Merridew has gone to bed, on the distinct understanding that the explosion is to take place at nine to-morrow morning, and that I am not to stir out of this part of the house until she comes and sets me free. She has no idea that the chief scene of the experiment is my sitting-room—or she

would have remained in it for the whole night! I am alone, and very anxious. Pray let me see you measure out the laudanum; I want to have something to do with it, even in the unimportant character of a mere looker-on.—R.V."

I followed Betteredge out of the room, and told him to remove the medicine-chest into Miss Verinder's sitting-room.

The order appeared to take him completely by surprise. He looked as if he suspected me of some occult medical design on Miss Verinder! "Might I presume to ask," he said, "what my young lady and the medicine chest have got to do with each other?"

"Stay in the sitting-room, and you will see."

Betteredge appeared to doubt his own unaided capacity to superintend me effectually, on an occasion when a medicine-chest was included in the proceedings.

"Is there any objection, sir," he asked, "to taking Mr. Bruff into this part of the business?"

"Quite the contrary! I am now going to ask Mr. Bruff to accompany me down-stairs."

Betteredge withdrew to fetch the medicine-chest, without another word. I went back into Mr. Blake's room, and knocked at the door of communication. Mr. Bruff opened it, with his papers

in his hand—immersed in Law; impenetrable to Medicine.

"I am sorry to disturb you," I said. "But I am going to prepare the laudanum for Mr. Blake; and I must request you to be present, and to see what I do."

"Yes?" said Mr. Bruff, with nine-tenths of his attention riveted on his papers, and with one-tenth unwillingly accorded to me. "Anything else?"

"I must trouble you to return here with me, and to see me administer the dose."

"Anything else?"

"One thing more. I must put you to the inconvenience of remaining in Mr. Blake's room, and of waiting to see what happens."

"Oh, very good!" said Mr. Bruff. "My room, or Mr. Blake's room—it doesn't matter which; I can go on with my papers anywhere. Unless you object, Mr. Jennings, to my importing *that* amount of common sense into the proceedings?"

Before I could answer, Mr. Blake addressed himself to the lawyer, speaking from his bed.

"Do you really mean to say that you don't feel any interest in what we are going to do?" he asked. "Mr. Bruff, you have no more imagination than a cow!"

"A cow is a very useful animal, Mr. Blake,"

said the lawyer. With that reply, he followed me out of the room, still keeping his papers in his hand.

We found Miss Verinder, pale and agitated, restlessly pacing her sitting-room from end to end. At a table in a corner, stood Betteredge, on guard over the medicine chest. Mr. Bruff sat down on the first chair that he could find, and (emulating the usefulness of the cow) plunged back again into his papers on the spot.

Miss Verinder drew me aside, and reverted instantly to her one all-absorbing interest—the interest in Mr. Blake.

"How is he now?" she asked. "Is he nervous? is he out of temper? Do you think it will succeed? Are you sure it will do no harm?"

"Quite sure. Come, and see me measure it out."

"One moment! It is past eleven now. How long will it be before anything happens?"

"It is not easy to say. An hour perhaps."

"I suppose the room must be dark, as it was last year."

"Certainly."

"I shall wait in my bedroom—just as I did before. I shall keep the door a little way open. It was a little way open last year. I will watch

the sitting-room door; and the moment it moves, I will blow out my light. It all happened in that way, on my birthday night. And it must all happen again in the same way, musn't it?"

"Are you sure you can control yourself, Miss Verinder?"

"In *his* interests, I can do anything!" she answered fervently.

One look at her face told me that I could trust her. I addressed myself again to Mr. Bruff.

"I must trouble you to put your papers aside for a moment," I said.

"Oh, certainly!" He got up with a start—as if I had disturbed him at a particularly interesting place—and followed me to the medicine chest. There, deprived of the breathless excitement incidental to the practice of his profession, he looked at Betteredge—and yawned wearily.

Miss Verinder joined me with a glass jug of cold water, which she had taken from a side-table. "Let me pour out the water," she whispered. "I *must* have a hand in it!"

"I measured out the forty minims from the bottle, and poured the laudanum into a medicine glass. "Fill it till it is three parts full," I said, and handed the glass to Miss Verinder. I then directed Betteredge to lock up the medicine chest;

informing him that I had done with it now. A look of unutterable relief overspread the old servant's countenance. He had evidently suspected me of a medical design on his young lady!

After adding the water as I had directed, Miss Verinder seized a moment—while Betteredge was locking the chest, and while Mr. Bruff was looking back at his papers—and slily kissed the rim of the medicine glass. "When you give it to him," said the charming girl, "give it to him on that side!"

I took the piece of crystal which was to represent the Diamond from my pocket, and gave it to her.

"You must have a hand in this, too," I said. "You must put it where you put the Moonstone last year."

She led the way to the Indian cabinet, and put the mock Diamond into the drawer which the real Diamond had occupied on the birthday night. Mr. Bruff witnessed this proceeding, under protest, as he had witnessed everything else. But the strong dramatic interest which the experiment was now assuming, proved (to my great amusement) to be too much for Betteredge's capacity of self-restraint. His hand trembled as he held the candle, and he whispered anxiously, "Are you sure, miss, it's the right drawer?"

I led the way out again, with the laudanum and

water in my hand. At the door, I stopped to address a last word to Miss Verinder.

"Don't be long in putting out the lights," I said.

"I will put them out at once," she answered. "And I will wait in my bedroom, with only one candle alight."

She closed the sitting-room door behind us. Followed by Mr. Bruff and Betteredge, I went back to Mr. Blake's room.

We found him moving restlessly from side to side of the bed, and wondering irritably whether he was to have the laudanum that night. In the presence of the two witnesses, I gave him the dose, and shook up his pillows, and told him to lie down again quietly and wait.

His bed, provided with light chintz curtains, was placed, with the head against the wall of the room, so as to leave a good open space on either side of it. On one side, I drew the curtains completely—and in the part of the room thus screened from his view, I placed Mr. Bruff and Betteredge, to wait for the result. At the bottom of the bed, I half drew the curtains—and placed my own chair at a little distance, so that I might let him see me or not see me, speak to me or not speak to me, just as the circumstances might direct. Having already been informed that he always slept with a light in

the room, I placed one of the two lighted candles on a little table at the head of the bed, where the glare of the light would not strike on his eyes. The other candle I gave to Mr. Bruff; the light, in this instance, being subdued by the screen of the chintz curtains. The window was open at the top so as to ventilate the room. The rain fell softly, the house was quiet. It was twenty minutes past eleven, by my watch, when the preparations were completed, and I took my place on the chair set apart at the bottom of the bed.

Mr. Bruff resumed his papers, with every appearance of being as deeply interested in them as ever. But looking towards him now, I saw certain signs and tokens which told me that the Law was beginning to lose its hold on him at last. The suspended interest of the situation in which we were now placed, was slowly asserting its influence even on *his* unimaginative mind. As for Betteredge, consistency of principle and dignity of conduct had become, in his case, mere empty words. He forgot that I was performing a conjuring trick on Mr. Franklin Blake; he forgot that I had upset the house from top to bottom; he forgot that I had not read Robinson Crusoe since I was a child. "For the Lord's sake, sir," he whispered to me, "tell us when it will begin to work."

"Not before midnight," I whispered back. "Say nothing, and sit still."

Betteredge dropped to the lowest depth of familiarity with me, without a struggle to save himself. He answered me by a wink!

Looking next towards Mr. Blake, I found him as restless as ever in his bed; fretfully wondering why the influence of the laudanum had not begun to assert itself yet. To tell him, in his present humour, that the more he fidgetted and wondered, the longer he would delay the result for which we were now waiting, would have been simply useless. The wiser course to take was to dismiss the idea of the opium from his mind, by leading him insensibly to think of something else.

With this view, I encouraged him to talk to me; contriving so to direct the conversation, on my side, as to lead it back again to the subject which had engaged us earlier in the evening—the subject of the Diamond. I took care to revert to those portions of the story of the Moonstone, which related to the transport of it from London to Yorkshire; to the risk which Mr. Blake had run in removing it from the bank at Frizinghall; and to the unexpected appearance of the Indians at the house, on the evening of the birthday. And I purposely assumed, in referring to these events, to have mis-

understood much of what Mr. Blake himself had told me a few hours since. In this way, I set him talking on the subject with which it was now vitally important to fill his mind—without allowing him to suspect that I was making him talk for a purpose. Little by little, he became so interested in putting me right that he forgot to fidget in the bed. His mind was far away from the question of the opium, at the all-important time when his eyes first told me that the opium was beginning to lay its hold on his brain.

I looked at my watch. It wanted five minutes to twelve, when the premonitory symptoms of the working of the laudanum first showed themselves to me.

At this time, no unpractised eyes would have detected any change in him. But, as the minutes of the new morning wore away, the swiftly-subtle progress of the influence began to show itself more plainly. The sublime intoxication of opium gleamed in his eyes; the dew of a stealthy perspiration began to glisten on his face. In five minutes more, the talk which he still kept up with me, failed in coherence. He held steadily to the subject of the Diamond; but he ceased to complete his sentences. A little later, the sentences dropped to single words. Then, there was an interval of silence. Then, he

sat up in bed. Then, still busy with the subject of the Diamond, he began to talk again—not to me, but to himself. That change told me that the first stage in the experiment was reached. The stimulant influence of the opium had got him.

The time, now, was twenty-three minutes past twelve. The next half hour, at most, would decide the question of whether he would, or would not, get up from his bed, and leave the room.

In the breathless interest of watching him—in the unutterable triumph of seeing the first result of the experiment declare itself in the manner, and nearly at the time, which I had anticipated—I had utterly forgotten the two companions of my night vigil. Looking towards them now, I saw the Law (as represented by Mr. Bruff's papers) lying unheeded on the floor. Mr. Bruff himself was looking eagerly through a crevice left in the imperfectly-drawn curtains of the bed. And Betteredge, oblivious of all respect for social distinctions, was peeping over Mr. Bruff's shoulder.

They both started back, on finding that I was looking at them, like two boys caught out by their schoolmaster in a fault. I signed to them to take off their boots quietly, as I was taking off mine. If Mr. Blake gave us the chance of following him, it was vitally necessary to follow him without noise.

Ten minutes passed — and nothing happened. Then, he suddenly threw the bed clothes off him. He put one leg out of bed. He waited.

"I wish I had never taken it out of the bank," he said to himself. "It was safe in the bank."

My heart throbbed fast; the pulses at my temples beat furiously. The doubt about the safety of the Diamond was, once more, the dominant impression in his brain! On that one pivot, the whole success of the experiment turned. The prospect thus suddenly opened before me, was too much for my shattered nerves. I was obliged to look away from him—or I should have lost my self-control.

There was another interval of silence.

When I could trust myself to look back at him, he was out of his bed, standing erect at the side of it. The pupils of his eyes were now contracted; his eyeballs gleamed in the light of the candle as he moved his head slowly to and fro. He was thinking; he was doubting—he spoke again.

"How do I know?" he said. "The Indians may be hidden in the house?"

He stopped, and walked slowly to the other end of the room. He turned—waited—came back to the bed.

"It's not even locked up," he went on. "It's

in the drawer of her cabinet. And the drawer doesn't lock."

He sat down on the side of the bed. "Anybody might take it," he said.

He rose again restlessly, and reiterated his first words.

"How do I know? The Indians may be hidden in the house."

He waited again. I drew back behind the half curtain of the bed. He looked about the room, with the vacant glitter in his eyes. It was a breathless moment. There was a pause of some sort. A pause in the action of the opium? a pause in the action of the brain? Who could tell? Everything depended, now, on what he did next.

He laid himself down again on the bed!

A horrible doubt crossed my mind. Was it possible that the sedative action of the opium was making itself felt already? It was not in my experience that it should do this. But what is experience, where opium is concerned? There are probably no two men in existence on whom the drug acts in exactly the same manner. Was some constitutional peculiarity in him, feeling the influence in some new way? Were we to fail, on the very brink of success?

No! He got up again abruptly. "How the

devil am I to sleep," he said, "with *this* on my mind?"

He looked at the light, burning on the table at the head of his bed. After a moment, he took the candle in his hand.

I blew out the second candle, burning behind the closed curtains. I drew back, with Mr. Bruff and Betteredge, into the farthest corner by the bed. I signed to them to be silent, as if their lives had depended on it.

We waited—seeing and hearing nothing. We waited, hidden from him by the curtains.

The light which he was holding on the other side of us, moved suddenly. The next moment, he passed us, swift and noiseless, with the candle in his hand.

He opened the bedroom door, and went out.

We followed him, along the corridor. We followed him down the stairs. We followed him along the second corridor. He never looked back; he never hesitated.

He opened the sitting-room door, and went in, leaving it open behind him.

The door was hung (like all the other doors in the house) on large old-fashioned hinges. When it was opened, a crevice was opened between the door and the post. I signed to my two companions to

look through this, so as to keep them from showing themselves. I placed myself—outside the door also—on the opposite side. A recess in the wall was at my left hand, in which I could instantly hide myself, if he showed any signs of looking back into the corridor.

He advanced to the middle of the room, with the candle still in his hand: he looked about him—but he never looked back.

I saw the door of Miss Verinder's bedroom, standing ajar. She had put out her light. She controlled herself nobly. The dim white outline of her summer dress was all that I could see. Nobody who had not known it beforehand, would have suspected that there was a living creature in the room. She kept back, in the dark: not a word, not a movement escaped her.

It was now ten minutes past one. I heard, through the dead silence, the soft drip of the rain and the tremulous passage of the night air through the trees.

After waiting irresolute, for a minute or more, in the middle of the room, he moved to the corner near the window, where the Indian cabinet stood.

He put his candle on the top of the cabinet. He opened, and shut, one drawer after another, until he came to the drawer in which the mock

Diamond was put. He looked into the drawer for a moment. Then, he took the mock Diamond out with his right hand. With the other hand, he took the candle from the top of the cabinet.

He walked back a few steps towards the middle of the room, and stood still again.

Thus far, he had exactly repeated what he had done on the birthday night. Would his next proceeding be the same as the proceeding of last year? Would he leave the room? Would he go back now, as I believed he had gone back then, to his bedchamber? Would he show us what he had done with the Diamond, when he had returned to his own room?

His first action, when he moved once more, proved to be an action which he had *not* performed, when he was under the influence of the opium for the first time. He put the candle down on a table, and wandered on a little towards the farther end of the room. There was a sofa here. He leaned heavily on the back of it, with his left hand—then roused himself, and returned to the middle of the room. I could now see his eyes. They were getting dull and heavy; the glitter in them was fast dying out.

The suspense of the moment proved too much for Miss Verinder's self-control. She advanced a

few steps—then stopped again. Mr. Bruff and Betteredge looked across the open doorway at me for the first time. The prevision of a coming disappointment was impressing itself on their minds as well as on mine.

Still, so long as he stood where he was, there was hope. We waited, in unutterable expectation, to see what would happen next.

The next event was decisive. He let the mock Diamond drop out of his hand.

It fell on the floor, before the doorway—plainly visible to him, and to every one. He made no effort to pick it up: he looked down at it vacantly, and, as he looked, his head sank on his breast. He staggered—roused himself for an instant—walked back unsteadily to the sofa—and sat down on it. He made a last effort; he tried to rise, and sank back. His head fell on the sofa cushions. It was then twenty-five minutes past one o'clock. Before I had put my watch back in my pocket, he was asleep.

It was all over now. The sedative influence had got him; the experiment was at an end.

I entered the room, telling Mr. Bruff and Betteredge that they might follow me. There was no fear of disturbing him. We were free to move and speak.

"The first thing to settle," I said, "is the question of what we are to do with him. He will probably sleep for the next six or seven hours, at least. It is some distance to carry him back to his own room. When I was younger, I could have done it alone. But my health and strength are not what they were—I am afraid I must ask you to help me."

Before they could answer, Miss Verinder called to me softly. She met me at the door of her room, with a light shawl, and with the counterpane from her own bed.

"Do you mean to watch him, while he sleeps?" she asked.

"Yes. I am not sure enough of the action of the opium, in his case, to be willing to leave him alone."

She handed me the shawl and the counterpane.

"Why should you disturb him?" she whispered. "Make his bed on the sofa. I can shut my door, and keep in my room."

It was infinitely the simplest and the safest way of disposing of him for the night. I mentioned the suggestion to Mr. Bruff and Betteredge—who both approved of my adopting it. In five minutes, I had laid him comfortably on the sofa, and had covered him lightly with the counterpane and the shawl.

Miss Verinder wished us good night, and closed the door. At my request, we three then drew round the table in the middle of the room, on which the candle was still burning, and on which writing materials were placed.

"Before we separate," I began, "I have a word to say about the experiment which has been tried to-night. Two distinct objects were to be gained by it. The first of these objects was to prove, that Mr. Blake entered this room, and took the Diamond, last year, acting unconsciously and irresponsibly, under the influence of opium. After what you have both seen, are you both satisfied, so far?"

They answered me in the affirmative, without a moment's hesitation.

"The second object," I went on, "was to discover what he did with the Diamond, after he was seen by Miss Verinder to leave her sitting-room with the jewel in his hand, on the birthday night. The gaining of this object depended, of course, on his still continuing exactly to repeat his proceedings of last year. He has failed to do that; and the purpose of the experiment is defeated accordingly. I can't assert that I am not disappointed at the result—but I can honestly say that I am not surprised by it. I told Mr. Blake from the first, that

our complete success in this matter, depended on our completely reproducing in him the physical and moral conditions of last year—and I warned him that this was the next thing to a downright impossibility. We have only partially reproduced the conditions, and the experiment has been only partially successful in consequence. It is also possible that I may have administered too large a dose of laudanum. But I myself look upon the first reason that I have given, as the true reason why we have to lament a failure, as well as to rejoice over a success."

After saying those words, I put the writing materials before Mr. Bruff, and asked him if he had any objection—before we separated for the night—to draw out, and sign, a plain statement of what he had seen. He at once took the pen, and produced the statement with the fluent readiness of a practised hand.

"I owe you this," he said, signing the paper, "as some atonement for what passed between us earlier in the evening. I beg your pardon, Mr. Jennings, for having doubted you. You have done Franklin Blake an inestimable service. In our legal phrase, you have proved your case."

Betteredge's apology was characteristic of the man.

"Mr. Jennings," he said, "when you read Robinson Crusoe again (which I strongly recommend you to do), you will find that he never scruples to acknowledge it, when he turns out to have been in the wrong. Please to consider me, sir, as doing what Robinson Crusoe did, on the present occasion." With those words he signed the paper in his turn.

Mr. Bruff took me aside, as we rose from the table.

"One word about the Diamond," he said. "Your theory is that Franklin Blake hid the Moonstone in his room. My theory is, that the Moonstone is in the possession of Mr. Luker's bankers in London. We won't dispute which of us is right. We will only ask, which of us is in a position to put his theory to the test."

"The test, in my case," I answered, "has been tried to-night, and has failed."

"The test, in my case," rejoined Mr. Bruff, "is still in process of trial. For the last two days, I have had a watch set for Mr. Luker at the bank; and I shall cause that watch to be continued until the last day of the month. I know that he must take the Diamond himself out of his bankers' hands—and I am acting on the chance that the person who has pledged the Diamond may force

him to do this, by redeeming the pledge. In that case, I may be able to lay my hand on the person. And there is a prospect of our clearing up the mystery, exactly at the point where the mystery baffles us now! Do you admit that, so far?"

I admitted it readily.

"I am going back to town by the morning train," pursued the lawyer. "I may hear, when I return, that a discovery has been made—and it may be of the greatest importance that I should have Franklin Blake at hand to appeal to, if necessary. I intend to tell him, as soon as he wakes, that he must return with me to London. After all that has happened, may I trust to your influence to back me?"

"Certainly!" I said.

Mr. Bruff shook hands with me, and left the room. Betteredge followed him out.

I went to the sofa to look at Mr. Blake. He had not moved since I had laid him down and made his bed—he lay locked in a deep and quiet sleep.

While I was still looking at him, I heard the bedroom door softly opened. Once more, Miss Verinder appeared on the threshold, in her pretty summer dress.

"Do me a last favour," she whispered. "Let me watch him with you."

I hesitated—not in the interests of propriety; only in the interest of her night's rest. She came close to me, and took my hand.

"I can't sleep; I can't even sit still, in my own room," she said. "Oh, Mr. Jennings, if you were me, only think how you would long to sit and look at him. Say, yes! Do!"

Is it necessary to mention that I gave way? Surely not!

She drew a chair to the foot of the sofa. She looked at him, in a silent ecstasy of happiness, till the tears rose in her eyes. She dried her eyes, and said she would fetch her work. She fetched her work, and never did a single stitch of it. It lay in her lap—she was not even able to look away from him long enough to thread her needle. I thought of my own youth; I thought of the gentle eyes which had once looked love at *me*. In the heaviness of my heart, I turned to my Journal for relief, and wrote in it what is written here.

So we kept our watch together in silence. One of us absorbed in his writing; the other absorbed in her love.

Hour after hour, he lay in his deep sleep. The

light of the new day grew and grew in the room, and still he never moved.

Towards six o'clock, I felt the warning which told me that my pains were coming back. I was obliged to leave her alone with him for a little while. I said I would go up-stairs, and fetch another pillow for him out of his room. It was not a long attack, this time. In a little while, I was able to venture back, and let her see me again.

I found her at the head of the sofa, when I returned. She was just touching his forehead with her lips. I shook my head as soberly as I could, and pointed to her chair. She looked back at me with a bright smile, and a charming colour in her face. "You would have done it," she whispered, "in my place!"

* * * * *

It is just eight o'clock. He is beginning to move for the first time.

Miss Verinder is kneeling by the side of the sofa. She has so placed herself that when his eyes first open, they must open on her face.

Shall I leave them together?

Yes!

* * * * *

Eleven o'clock.—The house is empty again. They

have arranged it among themselves; they have all gone to London by the ten o'clock train. My brief dream of happiness is over. I have awakened again to the realities of my friendless and lonely life.

I dare not trust myself to write down the kind words that have been said to me—especially by Miss Verinder and Mr. Blake. Besides, it is needless. Those words will come back to me in my solitary hours, and will help me through what is left of the end of my life. Mr. Blake is to write, and tell me what happens in London. Miss Verinder is to return to Yorkshire in the autumn (for her marriage, no doubt); and I am to take a holiday, and be a guest in the house. Oh me, how I felt it, as the grateful happiness looked at me out of her eyes, and the warm pressure of her hand said, "This is your doing!"

My poor patients are waiting for me. Back again, this morning, to the old routine! Back again, to-night, to the dreadful alternative between the opium and the pain!

God be praised for his mercy! I have seen a little sunshine—I have had a happy time.

Fifth Narrative.

The Story resumed by Franklin Blake.

CHAPTER I.

BUT few words are needed, on my part, to complete the narrative that has been presented in the Journal of Ezra Jennings.

Of myself, I have only to say that I awoke on the morning of the twenty-sixth, perfectly ignorant of all that I had said and done under the influence of the opium—from the time when the drug first laid its hold on me, to the time when I opened my eyes, in Rachel's sitting-room.

Of what happened after my waking, I do not feel called upon to render an account in detail. Confining myself merely to results, I have to report that Rachel and I thoroughly understood each other, before a single word of explanation had passed on either side. I decline to account, and

Rachel declines to account, for the extraordinary rapidity of our reconciliation. Sir and Madam, look back at the time when you were passionately attached to each other—and you will know what happened, after Ezra Jennings had shut the door of the sitting-room, as well as I know it myself.

I have, however, no objection to add, that we should have been certainly discovered by Mrs. Merridew, but for Rachel's presence of mind. She heard the sound of the old lady's dress in the corridor; and instantly ran out to meet her. I heard Mrs. Merridew say, "What is the matter?" and I heard Rachel answer, "The explosion!" Mrs. Merridew instantly permitted herself to be taken by the arm, and led into the garden, out of the way of the impending shock. On her return to the house, she met me in the hall, and expressed herself as greatly struck by the vast improvement in Science, since the time when she was a girl at school. "Explosions, Mr. Blake, are infinitely milder than they were. I assure you, I barely heard Mr. Jennings's explosion from the garden. And no smell afterwards, that I can detect, now we have come back to the house! I must really apologise to your medical friend. It is only due to him to say, that he has managed it beautifully!"

So, after vanquishing Betteredge and Mr. Bruff,

Ezra Jennings vanquished Mrs. Merridew herself. There is a great deal of undeveloped liberal feeling in the world, after all!

At breakfast, Mr. Bruff made no secret of his reasons for wishing that I should accompany him to London by the morning train. The watch kept at the bank, and the result which might yet come of it, appealed so irresistibly to Rachel's curiosity, that she at once decided (if Mrs. Merridew had no objection) on accompanying us back to town—so as to be within reach of the earliest news of our proceedings.

Mrs. Merridew proved to be all pliability and indulgence, after the truly considerate manner in which the explosion had conducted itself; and Betteredge was accordingly informed that we were all four to travel back together by the morning train. I fully expected that he would have asked leave to accompany us. But Rachel had wisely provided her faithful old servant with an occupation that interested him. He was charged with completing the refurnishing of the house, and was too full of his domestic responsibilities to feel the "detective-fever" as he might have felt it, under other circumstances.

Our one subject of regret, in going to London, was the necessity of parting, more abruptly than

we could have wished, with Ezra Jennings. It was impossible to persuade him to accompany us. I could only promise to write to him—and Rachel could only insist on his coming to see her when she returned to Yorkshire. There was every prospect of our meeting again in a few months—and yet there was something very sad in seeing our best and dearest friend left standing alone on the platform, as the train moved out of the station.

On our arrival in London, Mr. Bruff was accosted at the terminus by a small boy, dressed in a jacket and trousers of threadbare black cloth, and personally remarkable in virtue of the extraordinary prominence of his eyes. They projected so far, and they rolled about so loosely, that you wondered uneasily why they remained in their sockets. After listening to the boy, Mr. Bruff asked the ladies whether they would excuse our accompanying them back to Portland Place. I had barely time to promise Rachel that I would return, and tell her everything that had happened, before Mr. Bruff seized me by the arm, and hurried me into a cab. The boy with the ill-secured eyes, took his place on the box by the driver, and the driver was directed to go to Lombard-street.

"News from the bank?" I asked, as we started.

"News of Mr. Luker," said Mr. Bruff. "An

hour ago, he was seen to leave his house at Lambeth, in a cab, accompanied by two men, who were recognised by *my* men as police officers in plain clothes. If Mr. Luker's dread of the Indians is at the bottom of this precaution, the inference is plain enough. He is going to take the Diamond out of the bank."

"And we are going to the bank to see what comes of it?"

"Yes—or to hear what has come of it, if it is all over by this time. Did you notice my boy—on the box, there?"

"I noticed his eyes."

Mr. Bruff laughed. "They call the poor little wretch 'Gooseberry,' at the office," he said. "I employ him to go on errands—and I only wish my clerks who have nick-named him, were as thoroughly to be depended on as he is. Gooseberry is one of the sharpest boys in London, Mr. Blake, in spite of his eyes."

It was twenty minutes to five, when we drew up before the bank in Lombard-street. Gooseberry looked longingly at his master, as he opened the cab door.

"Do you want to come in too?" asked Mr. Bruff kindly. "Come in then, and keep at my heels till further orders. He's as quick as light-

ning," pursued Mr. Bruff, addressing me in a whisper. "Two words will do with Gooseberry, where twenty would be wanted with another boy."

We entered the bank. The outer office—with the long counter, behind which the cashiers sat—was crowded with people; all waiting their turn to take money out, or to pay money in, before the bank closed at five o'clock.

Two men among the crowd approached Mr. Bruff, as soon as he showed himself.

"Well," asked the lawyer. "Have you seen him?"

"He passed us here half an hour since, sir, and went on into the inner office."

"Has he not come out again yet?"

"No, sir."

Mr. Bruff turned to me. "Let us wait," he said.

I looked round among the people about me for the three Indians. Not a sign of them was to be seen anywhere. The only person present with a noticeably dark complexion was a tall man in a pilot coat, and a round hat, who looked like a sailor. Could this be one of them in disguise? Impossible! The man was taller than any of the Indians; and his face, where it was not hidden by a bushy black beard, was twice the breadth of any of their faces at least.

"They must have their spy somewhere," said Mr. Bruff, looking at the dark sailor in his turn. "And he may be the man."

Before he could say more, his coat tail was respectfully pulled by his attendant sprite with the gooseberry eyes. Mr. Bruff looked where the boy was looking. "Hush!" he said. "Here is Mr. Luker!"

The money-lender came out from the inner regions of the bank, followed by his two guardian policemen in plain clothes.

"Keep your eye on him," whispered Mr. Bruff. "If he passes the Diamond to anybody, he will pass it here."

Without noticing either of us, Mr. Luker slowly made his way to the door—now in the thickest, now in the thinnest part of the crowd. I distinctly saw his hand move, as he passed a short, stout man, respectably dressed in a suit of sober grey. The man started a little, and looked after him. Mr. Luker moved on slowly through the crowd. At the door, his guard placed themselves on either side of him. They were all three followed by one of Mr. Bruff's men—and I saw them no more.

I looked round at the lawyer, and then looked significantly towards the man in the suit of sober grey. "Yes!" whispered Mr. Bruff, "I saw it

too!" He turned about, in search of his second man. The second man was nowhere to be seen. He looked behind him for his attendant sprite. Gooseberry had disappeared.

"What the devil does it mean!" said Mr. Bruff angrily. "They have both left us at the very time when we want them most."

It came to the turn of the man in the grey suit to transact his business at the counter. He paid in a cheque—received a receipt for it—and turned to go out.

"What is to be done?" asked Mr. Bruff. "*We* can't degrade ourselves by following him."

"*I* can!" I said. "I wouldn't lose sight of that man for ten thousand pounds!"

"In that case," rejoined Mr. Bruff, "I wouldn't lose sight of *you*, for twice the money. A nice occupation for a man in my position," he muttered to himself, as we followed the stranger out of the bank. "For Heaven's sake don't mention it. I should be ruined if it was known."

The man in the grey suit got into an omnibus, going westward. We got in after him. There were latent reserves of youth still left in Mr. Bruff. I assert it positively—when he took his seat in the omnibus, he blushed!

The man with the grey suit stopped the omni-

bus, and got out in Oxford Street. We followed him again. He went into a chemist's shop.

Mr. Bruff started. "My chemist!" he exclaimed. "I am afraid we have made a mistake."

We entered the shop. Mr. Bruff and the proprietor exchanged a few words in private. The lawyer joined me again, with a very crestfallen face.

"It's greatly to our credit," he said, as he took my arm, and led me out—"that's one comfort!"

"What is to our credit?" I asked.

"Mr. Blake! you and I are the two worst amateur detectives that ever tried their hands at the trade. The man in the grey suit has been thirty years in the chemist's service. He was sent to the bank to pay money to his master's account—and he knows no more of the Moonstone than the babe unborn."

I asked what was to be done next.

"Come back to my office," said Mr. Bruff. "Gooseberry, and my second man, have evidently followed somebody else. Let us hope that *they* had their eyes about them at any rate!"

When we reached Gray's Inn Square, the second man had arrived there before us. He had been waiting for more than a quarter of an hour.

"Well!" asked Mr. Bruff. "What's your news?"

"I am sorry to say, sir," replied the man, "that I have made a mistake. I could have taken my oath that I saw Mr. Luker pass something to an elderly gentleman, in a light-coloured paletot. The elderly gentleman turns out, sir, to be a most respectable master ironmonger in Eastcheap."

"Where is Gooseberry?" asked Mr. Bruff resignedly.

The man stared. "I don't know, sir. I have seen nothing of him since I left the bank."

Mr. Bruff dismissed the man. "One of two things," he said to me. "Either Gooseberry has run away, or he is hunting on his own account. What do you say to dining here, on the chance that the boy may come back in an hour or two? I have got some good wine in the cellar, and we can get a chop from the coffee-house."

We dined at Mr. Bruff's chambers. Before the cloth was removed, "a person" was announced as wanting to speak to the lawyer. Was the person, Gooseberry? No: only the man who had been employed to follow Mr. Luker when he left the bank.

The report, in this case, presented no feature of the slightest interest. Mr. Luker had gone back to his own house, and had there dismissed his guard. He had not gone out again afterwards.

Towards dusk, the shutters had been put up, and the doors had been bolted. The street before the house, and the alley behind the house, had been carefully watched. No signs of the Indians had been visible. No person whatever had been seen loitering about the premises. Having stated these facts, the man waited to know whether there were any further orders. Mr. Bruff dismissed him for the night.

"Do you think Mr. Luker has taken the Moonstone home with him?" I asked.

"Not he," said Mr. Bruff. "He would never have dismissed his two policemen, if he had run the risk of keeping the Diamond in his own house again."

We waited another half hour for the boy, and waited in vain. It was then time for Mr. Bruff to go to Hampstead, and for me to return to Rachel in Portland Place. I left my card, in charge of the porter at the chambers, with a line written on it to say that I should be at my lodgings at half past ten, that night. The card was to be given to the boy, if the boy came back.

Some men have a knack of keeping appointments; and other men have a knack of missing them. I am one of the other men. Add to this, that I passed the evening at Portland Place, on the

same seat with Rachel, in a room forty feet long, with Mrs. Merridew at the further end of it. Does anybody wonder that I got home at half past twelve instead of half past ten? How thoroughly heartless that person must be! And how earnestly I hope I may never make that person's acquaintance!

My servant handed me a morsel of paper when he let me in.

I read, in a neat legal handwriting, these words:—"If you please, sir, I am getting sleepy. I will come back to-morrow morning, between nine and ten." Inquiry proved that a boy, with very extraordinary-looking eyes, had called, had presented my card and message, had waited an hour, had done nothing but fall asleep and wake up again, had written a line for me, and had gone home—after gravely informing the servant that "he was fit for nothing unless he got his night's rest."

At nine, the next morning, I was ready for my visitor. At half past nine, I heard steps outside my door. "Come in, Gooseberry!" I called out. "Thank you, sir," answered a grave and melancholy voice. The door opened. I started to my feet, and confronted—Sergeant Cuff!

"I thought I would look in here, Mr. Blake, on

the chance of your being in town, before I wrote to Yorkshire," said the Sergeant.

He was as dreary and as lean as ever. His eyes had not lost their old trick (so subtly noticed in Betteredge's Narrative) of "looking as if they expected something more from you than you were aware of yourself." But, so far as dress can alter a man, the great Cuff was changed beyond all recognition. He wore a broad-brimmed white hat, a light shooting jacket, white trowsers, and drab gaiters. He carried a stout oak stick. His whole aim and object seemed to be, to look as if he had lived in the country all his life. When I complimented him on his Metamorphosis, he declined to take it as a joke. He complained, quite gravely, of the noises and the smells of London. I declare I am far from sure that he did not speak with a slightly rustic accent! I offered him breakfast. The innocent countryman was quite shocked. *His* breakfast hour was half past six—and *he* went to bed with the cocks and hens!

"I only got back from Ireland last night," said the Sergeant, coming round to the practical object of his visit, in his own impenetrable manner. "Before I went to bed, I read your letter, telling me what has happened since my inquiry after the Diamond was suspended last year. There's only

one thing to be said about the matter, on my side. I completely mistook my case. How any man living was to have seen things in their true light, in such a situation as mine was at the time, I don't profess to know. But that doesn't alter the facts as they stand. I own that I made a mess of it. Not the first mess, Mr. Blake, which has distinguished my professional career! It's only in books that the officers of the detective force are superior to the weakness of making a mistake."

"You have come in the nick of time to recover your reputation," I said.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Blake," rejoined the Sergeant. "Now I have retired from business, I don't care a straw about my reputation. I have done with my reputation, thank God! I am here, sir, in grateful remembrance of the late Lady Verinder's liberality to me. I will go back to my old work—if you want me, and if you will trust me—on that consideration, and on no other. Not a farthing of money is to pass, if you please, from you to me. This is on honour. Now tell me, Mr. Blake, how the case stands since you wrote to me last."

I told him of the experiment with the opium, and of what had occurred afterwards at the bank in Lombard Street. He was greatly struck by the

experiment—it was something entirely new in his experience. And he was particularly interested in the theory of Ezra Jennings, relating to what I had done with the Diamond, after I had left Rachel's sitting-room, on the birthday night.

"I don't hold with Mr. Jennings that you hid the Moonstone," said Sergeant Cuff. "But I agree with him, that you must certainly have taken it back to your own room."

"Well?" I asked. "And what happened then?"

"Have you no suspicion yourself of what happened, sir?"

"None whatever."

"Has Mr. Bruff no suspicion?"

"No more than I have."

Sergeant Cuff rose, and went to my writing-table. He came back with a sealed envelope. It was marked "Private;" it was addressed to me; and it had the Sergeant's signature in the corner.

"I suspected the wrong person, last year," he said: "and I may be suspecting the wrong person now. Wait to open the envelope, Mr. Blake, till you have got at the truth. And then compare the name of the guilty person, with the name that I have written in that sealed letter."

I put the letter into my pocket—and then asked

for the Sergeant's opinion of the measures which we had taken at the bank.

"Very well intended, sir," he answered, "and quite the right thing to do. But there was another person who ought to have been looked after besides Mr. Luker."

"The person named in the letter you have just given to me?"

"Yes, Mr. Blake, the person named in the letter. It can't be helped now. I shall have something to propose to you and Mr. Bruff, sir, when the time comes. Let's wait, first, and see if the boy has anything to tell us that is worth hearing."

It was close on ten o'clock, and the boy had not made his appearance. Sergeant Cuff talked of other matters. He asked after his old friend Betteredge, and his old enemy the gardener. In a minute more, he would no doubt have got from this, to the subject of his favourite roses, if my servant had not interrupted us by announcing that the boy was below.

On being brought into the room, Gooseberry stopped at the threshold of the door, and looked distrustfully at the stranger who was in my company. I told the boy to come to me.

"You may speak before this gentleman," I said. "He is here to assist me; and he knows all that

has happened. Sergeant Cuff," I added, "this is the boy from Mr. Bruff's office."

In our modern system of civilisation, celebrity (no matter of what kind) is the lever that will move anything. The fame of the great Cuff had even reached the ears of the small Gooseberry. The boy's ill-fixed eyes rolled, when I mentioned the illustrious name, till I thought they really must have dropped on the carpet.

"Come here, my lad," said the Sergeant, "and let's hear what you have got to tell us."

The notice of the great man—the hero of many a famous story in every lawyer's office in London—appeared to fascinate the boy. He placed himself in front of Sergeant Cuff, and put his hands behind him, after the approved fashion of a neophyte who is examined in his catechism.

"What is your name?" said the Sergeant, beginning with the first question in the catechism.

"Octavius Guy," answered the boy. "They call me Gooseberry at the office because of my eyes."

"Octavius Guy, otherwise Gooseberry," pursued the Sergeant, with the utmost gravity, "you were missed at the bank yesterday. What were you about?"

"If you please, sir, I was following a man."

"Who was he?"

"A tall man, sir, with a big black beard, dressed like a sailor."

"I remember the man!" I broke in. "Mr. Bruff and I thought he was a spy, employed by the Indians."

Sergeant Cuff did not appear to be much impressed by what Mr. Bruff and I had thought. He went on catechising Gooseberry.

"Well?" he said—"and why did you follow the sailor?"

"If you please, sir, Mr. Bruff wanted to know whether Mr. Luker passed anything to anybody on his way out of the bank. I saw Mr. Luker pass something to the sailor with the black beard."

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Bruff what you saw?"

"I hadn't time to tell anybody, sir, the sailor went out in such a hurry."

"And you ran out after him—eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Gooseberry," said the Sergeant, patting his head, "you have got something in that small skull of yours—and it isn't cotton-wool. I am greatly pleased with you, so far."

The boy blushed with pleasure. Sergeant Cuff went on.

"Well? and what did the sailor do, when he got into the street?"

"He called a cab, sir."

"And what did you do?"

"Held on behind, and run after it."

Before the Sergeant could put his next question, another visitor was announced—the head clerk from Mr. Bruff's office.

Feeling the importance of not interrupting Sergeant Cuff's examination of the boy, I received the clerk in another room. He came with bad news of his employer. The agitation and excitement of the last two days had proved too much for Mr. Bruff. He had awoke that morning with an attack of gout; he was confined to his room at Hampstead; and, in the present critical condition of our affairs, he was very uneasy at being compelled to leave me without the advice and assistance of an experienced person. The chief clerk had received orders to hold himself at my disposal, and was willing to do his best to replace Mr. Bruff.

I wrote at once to quiet the old gentleman's mind, by telling him of Sergeant Cuff's visit: adding that Gooseberry was at that moment under examination; and promising to inform Mr. Bruff, either personally or by letter, of whatever might occur later in the day. Having despatched the clerk to

Hampstead with my note, I returned to the room which I had left, and found Sergeant Cuff at the fireplace, in the act of ringing the bell.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Blake," said the Sergeant. "I was just going to send word by your servant that I wanted to speak to you. There isn't a doubt on my mind that this boy—this most meritorious boy," added the Sergeant, patting Gooseberry on the head, "has followed the right man. Precious time has been lost, sir, through your unfortunately not being at home at half past ten last night. The only thing to do, now, is to send for a cab immediately."

In five minutes more, Sergeant Cuff and I (with Gooseberry on the box to guide the driver) were on our way eastward, towards the City.

"One of these days," said the Sergeant, pointing through the front window of the cab, "that boy will do great things in my late profession. He is the brightest and cleverest little chap I have met with, for many a long year past. You shall hear the substance, Mr. Blake, of what he told me while you were out of the room. You were present, I think, when he mentioned that he held on behind the cab, and ran after it?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, the cab went from Lombard Street

to the Tower Wharf. The sailor with the black beard got out, and spoke to the steward of the Rotterdam steamboat, which was to start next morning. He asked if he could be allowed to go on board at once, and sleep in his berth over-night. The steward said, No. The cabins, and berths, and bedding were all to have a thorough cleaning that evening, and no passenger could be allowed to come on board, before the morning. The sailor turned round, and left the wharf. When he got into the street again, the boy noticed for the first time, a man dressed like a respectable mechanic, walking on the opposite side of the road, and apparently keeping the sailor in view. The sailor stopped at an eating-house in the neighbourhood, and went in. The boy—not being able to make up his mind, at the moment—hung about among some other boys, staring at the good things in the eating-house window. He noticed the mechanic waiting, as he himself was waiting—but still on the opposite side of the street. After a minute, a cab came by slowly, and stopped where the mechanic was standing. The boy could only see plainly one person in the cab, who leaned forward at the window to speak to the mechanic. He described that person, Mr. Blake, without any prompting from me, as having a dark face, like the face of an Indian."

It was plain, by this time, that Mr. Bruff and I had made another mistake. The sailor with the black beard was clearly not a spy in the service of the Indian conspiracy. Was he, by any possibility, the man who had got the Diamond?

"After a little," pursued the Sergeant, "the cab moved on slowly down the street. The mechanic crossed the road, and went into the eating-house. The boy waited outside till he was hungry and tired—and then went into the eating-house, in his turn. He had a shilling in his pocket; and he dined sumptuously, he tells me, on a black-pudding, an eel-pie, and a bottle of ginger-beer. What can a boy *not* digest? The substance in question has never been found yet."

"What did he see in the eating-house?" I asked.

"Well, Mr. Blake, he saw the sailor reading the newspaper at one table, and the mechanic reading the newspaper at another. It was dusk before the sailor got up, and left the place. He looked about him suspiciously when he got out into the street. The boy—*being* a boy—passed unnoticed. The mechanic had not come out yet. The sailor walked on, looking about him, and apparently not very certain of where he was going next. The mechanic appeared once more, on the opposite side of the road. The sailor went on, till he got to Shore Lane, leading

into Lower Thames Street. There he stopped before a public-house, under the sign of The Wheel of Fortune, and, after examining the place outside, went in. Gooseberry went in too. There were a great many people, mostly of the decent sort, at the bar. The Wheel of Fortune is a very respectable house, Mr. Blake; famous for its porter and pork-pies."

The Sergeant's digressions irritated me. He saw it; and confined himself more strictly to Gooseberry's evidence when he went on.

"The sailor," he resumed, "asked if he could have a bed. The landlord said 'No; they were full.' The barmaid corrected him, and said 'Number Ten was empty.' A waiter was sent for to show the sailor to Number Ten. Just before that, Gooseberry had noticed the mechanic among the people at the bar. Before the waiter had answered the call, the mechanic had vanished. The sailor was taken off to his room. Not knowing what to do next, Gooseberry had the wisdom to wait and see if anything happened. Something did happen. The landlord was called for. Angry voices were heard up-stairs. The mechanic suddenly made his appearance again, collared by the landlord, and exhibiting, to Gooseberry's great surprise, all the signs and tokens of being drunk. The landlord thrust him

out at the door, and threatened him with the police if he came back. From the altercation between them, while this was going on, it appeared that the man had been discovered in Number Ten, and had declared with drunken obstinacy that he had taken the room. Gooseberry was so struck by this sudden intoxication of a previously sober person, that he couldn't resist running out after the mechanic into the street. As long as he was in sight of the public house, the man reeled about in the most disgraceful manner. The moment he turned the corner of the street, he recovered his balance instantly, and became as sober a member of society as you could wish to see. Gooseberry went back to The Wheel of Fortune, in a very bewildered state of mind. He waited about again, on the chance of something happening. Nothing happened; and nothing more was to be heard, or seen, of the sailor. Gooseberry decided on going back to the office. Just as he came to this conclusion, who should appear, on the opposite side of the street as usual, but the mechanic again! He looked up at one particular window at the top of the public-house, which was the only one that had a light in it. The light seemed to relieve his mind. He left the place directly. The boy made his way back to Gray's Inn—got your card and message—called—

and failed to find you. There you have the state of the case, Mr. Blake, as it stands at the present time."

"What is your own opinion of the case, Sergeant?"

"I think it's serious, sir. Judging by what the boy saw, the Indians are in it, to begin with."

"Yes. And the sailor is evidently the person to whom Mr. Luker passed the Diamond. It seems odd that Mr. Bruff, and I, and the man in Mr. Bruff's employment, should all have been mistaken about who the person was."

"Not at all, Mr. Blake. Considering the risk that person ran, it's likely enough that Mr. Luker purposely misled you, by previous arrangement between them."

"Do you understand the proceedings at the public-house?" I asked. "The man dressed like a mechanic, was acting of course in the employment of the Indians. But I am as much puzzled to account for his sudden assumption of drunkenness as Gooseberry himself."

"I think I can give a guess at what it means, sir," said the Sergeant. "If you will reflect, you will see that the man must have had some pretty strict instructions from the Indians. They were far too noticeable themselves to risk being seen at the bank, or in the public-house—they were obliged

to trust everything to their deputy. Very good. Their deputy hears a certain number named, in the public-house, as the number of the room which the sailor is to have for the night—that being also the room (unless our notion is all wrong) which the Diamond is to have for the night, too. Under those circumstances, the Indians, you may rely on it, would insist on having a description of the room —of its position in the house, of its capability of being approached from the outside, and so on. What was the man to do, with such orders as these? Just what he did! He ran upstairs to get a look at the room, before the sailor was taken into it. He was found there, making his observations—and he shammed drunk, as the easiest way of getting out of the difficulty. That's how I read the riddle. After he was turned out of the public-house, he probably went with his report, to the place where his employers were waiting for him. And his employers, no doubt, sent him back to make sure that the sailor was really settled at the public-house till the next morning. As for what happened at The Wheel of Fortune, after the boy left—we ought to have discovered that last night. It's eleven in the morning, now. We must hope for the best, and find out what we can."

In a quarter of an hour more, the cab stopped

in Shore Lane, and Gooseberry opened the door for us to get out.

"All right?" asked the Sergeant.

"All right," answered the boy.

The moment we entered The Wheel of Fortune, it was plain even to my inexperienced eyes that there was something wrong in the house.

The only person behind the counter at which the liquors were served, was a bewildered servant girl, perfectly ignorant of the business. One or two customers, waiting for their morning drink, were tapping impatiently on the counter with their money. The barmaid appeared from the inner regions of the parlour, excited and pre-occupied. She answered Sergeant Cuff's inquiry for the landlord, by telling him sharply that her master was up-stairs, and was not to be bothered by anybody.

"Come along with me, sir," said Sergeant Cuff, coolly leading the way up-stairs, and beckoning to the boy to follow him.

The barmaid called to her master, and warned him that strangers were intruding themselves into the house. On the first floor we were encountered by the landlord, hurrying down, in a highly irritated state, to see what was the matter.

"Who the devil are you? and what do you want here?" he asked.

"Keep your temper," said the Sergeant, quietly. "I'll tell you who I am, to begin with. I am Sergeant Cuff."

The illustrious name instantly produced its effect. The angry landlord threw open the door of a sitting-room, and asked the Sergeant's pardon.

"I am annoyed and out of sorts, sir—that's the truth," he said. "Something unpleasant has happened in the house this morning. A man in my way of business has a deal to upset his temper, Sergeant Cuff."

"Not a doubt of it," said the Sergeant. "I'll come at once, if you will allow me, to what brings us here. This gentleman and I want to trouble you with a few inquiries, on a matter of some interest to both of us."

"Relating to what, sir?" asked the landlord.

"Relating to a dark man, dressed like a sailor, who slept here last night."

"Good God! that's the man who is upsetting the whole house at this moment!" exclaimed the landlord. "Do you, or does this gentleman, know anything about him?"

"We can't be certain till we see him," answered the Serjeant.

"See him?" echoed the landlord. "That's the

one thing that nobody has been able to do since seven o'clock this morning. That was the time when he left word, last night, that he was to be called. He *was* called—and there was no getting an answer from him, and no opening his door to see what was the matter. They tried again at eight, and they tried again at nine. No use! There was the door still locked—and not a sound to be heard in the room! I have been out this morning—and I only got back a quarter of an hour ago. I have hammered at the door myself—and all to no purpose. The potboy has gone to fetch a carpenter. If you can wait a few minutes, gentlemen, we will have the door opened, and see what it means."

"Was the man drunk last night?" asked Sergeant Cuff.

"Perfectly sober, sir—or I would never have let him sleep in my house."

"Did he pay for his bed beforehand?"

"No."

"Could he leave the room in any way, without going out by the door?"

"The room is a garret," said the landlord. "But there's a trap-door in the ceiling, leading out on to the roof—and a little lower down the street, there's an empty house under repair. Do you

think, Serjeant, the blackguard has got off in that way, without paying?"

"A sailor," said Sergeant Cuff, "might have done it—early in the morning, before the street was astir. He would be used to climbing, and his head wouldn't fail him on the roofs of the houses."

As he spoke, the arrival of the carpenter was announced. We all went up-stairs, at once, to the top story. I noticed that the Serjeant was unusually grave, even for *him*. It also struck me as odd that he told the boy (after having previously encouraged him to follow us), to wait in the room below till we came down again.

The carpenter's hammer and chisel disposed of the resistance of the door in a few minutes. But some article of furniture had been placed against it inside, as a barricade. By pushing at the door, we thrust this obstacle aside, and so got admission to the room. The landlord entered first; the Serjeant second; and I third. The other persons present followed us.

We all looked towards the bed, and all started.

The man had not left the room. He lay, dressed, on the bed—with a white pillow over his face, which completely hid it from view.

"What does that mean?" said the landlord, pointing to the pillow.

Serjeant Cuff led the way to the bed, without answering, and removed the pillow.

The man's swarthy face was placid and still; his black hair and beard were slightly, very slightly, discomposed. His eyes stared wide open, glassy and vacant, at the ceiling. The filmy look and the fixed expression of them horrified me. I turned away, and went to the open window. The rest of them remained, where Serjeant Cuff remained, at the bed.

"He's in a fit!" I heard the landlord say.

"He's dead," the Serjeant answered. "Send for the nearest doctor, and send for the police."

The waiter was despatched on both errands. Some strange fascination seemed to hold Serjeant Cuff to the bed. Some strange curiosity seemed to keep the rest of them waiting, to see what the Serjeant would do next.

I turned again to the window. The moment afterwards, I felt a soft pull at my coat-tails, and a small voice whispered, "Look here, sir!"

Gooseberry had followed us into the room. His loose eyes rolled frightfully—not in terror, but in exultation. He had made a detective-discovery on his own account. "Look here, sir," he repeated —and led me to a table in a corner of the room.

On the table stood a little wooden box, open,

and empty. On one side of the box lay some jewellers' cotton. On the other side, was a torn sheet of white paper, with a seal on it, partly destroyed, and with an inscription in writing, which was still perfectly legible. The inscription was in these words.

"Deposited with Messrs. Bushe, Lysaught, and Bushe, by Mr. Septimus Luker, of Middlesex Place, Lambeth, a small wooden box, sealed up in this envelope, and containing a valuable of great price. The box, when claimed, to be only given up by Messrs. Bushe and Co. on the personal application of Mr. Luker."

Those lines removed all further doubt, on one point at least. The sailor had been in possession of the Moonstone, when he had left the bank on the previous day.

I felt another pull at my coat-tails. Gooseberry had not done with me yet.

"Robbery!" whispered the boy, pointing, in high delight, to the empty box.

"You were told to wait down-stairs," I said. "Go away!"

"And Murder!" added Gooseberry, pointing, with a keener relish still, to the man on the bed.

There was something so hideous in the boy's enjoyment of the horror of the scene, that I took

him by the two shoulders and put him out of the room.

At the moment when I crossed the threshold of the door, I heard Sergeant Cuff's voice, asking where I was. He met me, as I returned into the room, and forced me to go back with him to the bedside.

"Mr. Blake!" he said. "Look at the man's face. It is a face disguised—and here's the proof of it!"

He traced with his finger a thin line of livid white, running backward from the dead man's forehead, between the swarthy complexion, and the slightly-disturbed black hair. "Let's see what is under this," said the Sergeant, suddenly seizing the black hair, with a firm grip of his hand.

My nerves were not strong enough to bear it. I turned away again from the bed.

The first sight that met my eyes, at the other end of the room, was the irrepressible Gooseberry, perched on a chair, and looking with breathless interest, over the heads of his elders, at the Sergeant's proceedings.

"He's pulling off his wig!" whispered Gooseberry, compassionating my position, as the only person in the room who could see nothing.

There was a pause—and then a cry of astonishment among the people round the bed.

"He's pulled off his beard!" cried Gooseberry.

There was another pause—Sergeant Cuff asked for something. The landlord went to the wash-hand-stand, and returned to the bed with a basin of water and a towel.

Gooseberry danced with excitement on the chair. "Come up here, along with me, sir! He's washing off his complexion now!"

The Sergeant suddenly burst his way through the people about him, and came, with horror in his face, straight to the place where I was standing.

"Come back to the bed, sir!" he began. He looked at me closer, and checked himself. "No!" he resumed. "Open the sealed letter first—the letter I gave you this morning."

I opened the letter.

"Read the name, Mr. Blake, that I have written inside."

I read the name that he had written. It was—*Godfrey Ablewhite.*

"Now," said the Sergeant, "come with me, and look at the man on the bed."

I went with him, and looked at the man on the bed.

Godfrey Ablewhite!

SIXTH NARRATIVE.

Contributed by Sergeant Cuff.

I.

DORKING, Surrey, July 30th, 1849. To Franklin Blake, Esq. Sir.—I beg to apologise for the delay that has occurred in the production of the Report, with which I engaged to furnish you. I have waited to make it a complete Report; and I have been met, here and there, by obstacles which it was only possible to remove by some little expenditure of patience and time.

The object which I proposed to myself has now, I hope, been attained. You will find, in these pages, answers to the greater part—if not all—of the questions, concerning the late Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, which occurred to your mind when I last had the honour of seeing you.

I propose to tell you—in the first place—what is known of the manner in which your cousin met his

death; appending to the statement such inferences and conclusions as we are justified (according to my opinion) in drawing from the facts.

I shall then endeavour—in the second place—to put you in possession of such discoveries as I have made, respecting the proceedings of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, before, during, and after the time, when you and he met as guests at the late Lady Verinder's country house.

II.

As to your cousin's death, then, first.

It appears to me to be established, beyond any reasonable doubt, that he was killed (while he was asleep, or immediately on his waking) by being smothered with a pillow from his bed—that the persons guilty of murdering him are the three Indians—and that the object contemplated (and achieved) by the crime, was to obtain possession of the diamond, called The Moonstone.

The facts from which this conclusion is drawn, are derived partly from an examination of the room at the tavern; and partly from the evidence obtained at the Coroner's Inquest.

On forcing the door of the room, the deceased gentleman was discovered, dead, with the pillow of the bed over his face. The medical man who ex-

amined him, being informed of this circumstance, considered the post-mortem appearances as being perfectly compatible with murder by smothering—that is to say, with murder committed by some person, or persons, pressing the pillow over the nose and mouth of the deceased, until death resulted from congestion of the lungs.

Next, as to the motive for the crime.

A small box, with a sealed paper torn off from it (the paper containing an inscription) was found open, and empty, on a table in the room. Mr. Luker has himself personally identified the box, the seal, and the inscription. He has declared that the box did actually contain the diamond, called the Moonstone; and he has admitted having given the box (thus sealed up) to Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite (then concealed under a disguise), on the afternoon of the twenty-sixth of June last. The fair inference from all this is, that the stealing of the Moonstone was the motive of the crime.

Next, as to the manner in which the crime was committed.

On examination of the room (which is only seven feet high), a trap-door in the ceiling, leading out on to the roof of the house, was discovered open. The short ladder, used for obtaining access to the trap-door (and kept under the bed), was

found placed at the opening, so as to enable any person, or persons, in the room, to leave it again easily. In the trap-door itself was found a square aperture cut in the wood, apparently with some exceedingly sharp instrument, just behind the bolt which fastened the door on the inner side. In this way, any person from the outside could have drawn back the bolt, and opened the door, and have dropped (or have been noiselessly lowered by an accomplice) into the room—its height, as already observed, being only seven feet. That some person, or persons, must have got admission in this way, appears evident from the fact of the aperture being there. As to the manner in which he (or they) obtained access to the roof of the tavern, it is to be remarked that the third house, lower down in the street, was empty, and under repair—that a long ladder was left by the workmen, leading from the pavement to the top of the house—and that, on returning to their work, on the morning of the 27th, the men found the plank which they had tied to the ladder, to prevent any one from using it in their absence, removed, and lying on the ground. As to the possibility of ascending by this ladder, passing over the roofs of the houses, passing back, and descending again, unobserved—it is discovered, on the evidence of the night policeman, that he

only passes through Shore Lane twice in an hour, when out on his beat. The testimony of the inbitants also declares, that Shore Lane, after midnight, is one of the quietest and loneliest streets in London. Here again, therefore, it seems fair to infer that—with ordinary caution, and presence of mind—any man, or men, might have ascended by the ladder, and might have descended again, unobserved. Once on the roof of the tavern, it has been proved, by experiment, that a man might cut through the trap-door, while lying down on it, and that in such a position, the parapet in front of the house would conceal him from the view of any one passing in the street.

Lastly, as to the person, or persons, by whom the crime was committed.

It is known (1) that the Indians had an interest in possessing themselves of the Diamond. (2) It is at least probable that the man looking like an Indian, whom Octavius Guy saw at the window of the cab, speaking to the man dressed like a mechanic, was one of the three Hindoo conspirators. (3) It is certain that this same man dressed like a mechanic, was seen keeping Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite in view, all through the evening of the 26th, and was found in the bedroom (before Mr. Ablewhite was shown into it) under circumstances

which lead to the suspicion that he was examining the room. (4) A morsel of torn gold thread was picked up in the bedroom, which persons expert in such matters, declare to be of Indian manufacture, and to be a species of gold thread not known in England. (5) On the morning of the 27th, three men, answering to the description of the three Indians, were observed in Lower Thames Street, were traced to the Tower Wharf, and were seen to leave London by the steamer bound for Rotterdam.

There is here, moral, if not legal, evidence, that the murder was committed by the Indians.

Whether the man personating a mechanic was, or was not, an accomplice in the crime, it is impossible to say. That he could have committed the murder alone, seems beyond the limits of probability. Acting by himself, he could hardly have smothered Mr. Ablewhite—who was the taller and stronger man of the two—without a struggle taking place, or a cry being heard. A servant girl, sleeping in the next room, heard nothing. The landlord, sleeping in the room below, heard nothing. The whole evidence points to the inference that more than one man was concerned in this crime—and the circumstances, I repeat, morally justify the conclusion that the Indians committed it.

I have only to add, that the verdict at the

Coroner's Inquest was Wilful Murder against some person, or persons, unknown. Mr. Ablewhite's family have offered a reward, and no effort has been left untried to discover the guilty persons. The man dressed like a mechanic has eluded all inquiries. The Indians have been traced. As to the prospect of ultimately capturing these last, I shall have a word to say to you on that head, when I reach the end of the present Report.

In the meanwhile having now written all that is needful on the subject of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's death, I may pass next to the narrative of his proceedings before, during, and after the time, when you and he met at the late Lady Verinder's house.

III.

With regard to the subject now in hand, I may state, at the outset, that Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's life had two sides to it.

The side turned up to the public view, presented the spectacle of a gentleman, possessed of considerable reputation as a speaker at charitable meetings, and endowed with administrative abilities, which he placed at the disposal of various Benevolent Societies, mostly of the female sort. The side kept hidden from the general notice, exhibited this same gentleman in the totally different character of a man

of pleasure, with a villa in the suburbs which was not taken in his own name, and with a lady in the villa, who was not taken in his own name, either.

My investigations in the villa have shown me several fine pictures and statues; furniture tastefully selected, and admirably made; and a conservatory of the rarest flowers, the match of which it would not be easy to find in all London. My investigation of the lady has resulted in the discovery of jewels which are worthy to take rank with the flowers, and of carriages and horses which have (deservedly) produced a sensation in the Park, among persons well qualified to judge of the build of the one, and the breed of the others.

All this is, so far, common enough. The villa and the lady are such familiar objects in London life, that I ought to apologise for introducing them to notice. But what is not common and not familiar (in my experience), is that all these fine things were not only ordered, but paid for. The pictures, the statues, the flowers, the jewels, the carriages and the horses—inquiry proved, to my indescribable astonishment, that not a sixpence of debt was owing on any of them. As to the villa, it had been bought, out and out, and settled on the lady.

I might have tried to find the right reading of

this riddle, and tried in vain—but for Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's death, which caused an inquiry to be made into the state of his affairs.

The inquiry elicited these facts:—

That Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite was entrusted with the care of a sum of twenty thousand pounds—as one of two Trustees for a young gentleman, who was still a minor in the year eighteen hundred and forty-eight. That the Trust was to lapse, and that the young gentleman was to receive the twenty thousand pounds on the day when he came of age, in the month of February, eighteen hundred and fifty. That, pending the arrival of this period, an income of six hundred pounds was to be paid to him by his two Trustees, half-yearly—at Christmas and Midsummer Day. That this income was regularly paid by the active Trustee, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. That the twenty thousand pounds (from which the income was supposed to be derived) had every farthing of it, been sold out of the Funds, at different periods, ending with the end of the year eighteen hundred and forty seven. That the power of attorney, authorising the bankers to sell out the stock, and the various written orders telling them what amounts to sell out, were formally signed by both the Trustees. That the signature of the second Trustee (a retired army officer, living in the country) was a signature

forged, in every case, by the active Trustee—otherwise Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

In these facts, lies the explanation of Mr. Godfrey's honourable conduct, in paying the debts incurred for the lady and the villa—and (as you will presently see) of more besides.

We may now advance to the date of Miss Verinder's birthday (in the year eighteen hundred and forty-eight)—the twenty-first of June.

On the day before, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite arrived at his father's house, and asked (as I know from Mr. Ablewhite, senior, himself) for a loan of three hundred pounds. Mark the sum; and remember at the same time, that the half-yearly payment to the young gentleman was due on the twenty-fourth of the month. Also, that the whole of the young gentleman's fortune had been spent by his Trustee, by the end of the year 'forty-seven.

Mr. Ablewhite, senior, refused to lend his son a farthing.

The next day Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite rode over, with you, to Lady Verinder's house. A few hours afterwards, Mr. Godfrey (as you yourself have told me) made a proposal of marriage to Miss Verinder. Here, he saw his way no doubt—if accepted—to the end of all his money anxieties, present and

future. But, as events actually turned out, what happened? Miss Verinder refused him.

On the night of the birthday, therefore, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's pecuniary position was this. He had three hundred pounds to find on the twenty-fourth of the month, and twenty thousand pounds to find in February eighteen hundred and fifty. Failing to raise these sums, at these times, he was a ruined man.

Under those circumstances, what takes place next?

You exasperate Mr. Candy, the doctor, on the sore subject of his profession; and he plays you a practical joke, in return, with a dose of laudanum. He trusts the administration of the dose, prepared in a little phial, to Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite—who has himself confessed the share he had in the matter, under circumstances which shall presently be related to you. Mr. Godfrey is all the readier to enter into the conspiracy, having himself suffered from your sharp tongue, in the course of the evening. He joins Betteredge in persuading you to drink a little brandy and water before you go to bed. He privately drops the dose of laudanum into your cold grog. And you drink the mixture.

Let us now shift the scene, if you please, to Mr. Luker's house at Lambeth. And allow me to

remark, by way of preface, that Mr. Bruff and I, together, have found a means of forcing the money-lender to make a clean breast of it. We have carefully sifted the statement he has addressed to us; and here it is at your service.

IV.

Late on the evening of Friday, the twenty-third of June ('forty-eight), Mr. Luker was surprised by a visit from Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. He was more than surprised, when Mr. Godfrey produced the Moonstone. No such diamond (according to Mr. Luker's experience) was in the possession of any private person in Europe.

Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite had two modest proposals to make, in relation to this magnificent gem. First, Would Mr. Luker be so good as to buy it? Secondly, Would Mr. Luker (in default of seeing his way to the purchase) undertake to sell it on commission, and to pay a sum down, on the anticipated result?

Mr. Luker tested the Diamond, weighed the Diamond, and estimated the value of the Diamond, before he answered a word. *His* estimate (allowing for the flaw in the stone) was thirty thousand pounds.

Having reached that result, Mr. Luker opened his

lips, and put a question: "How did you come by this?" Only six words! But what volumes of meaning in them!

Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite began a story. Mr. Luker opened his lips again, and only said three words, this time. "That won't do!"

Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite began another story. Mr. Luker wasted no more words on him. He got up, and rang the bell for the servant, to show the gentleman out.

Upon this compulsion, Mr. Godfrey made an effort, and came out with a new and amended version of the affair, to the following effect.

After privately slipping the laudanum into your brandy and water, he wished you good-night, and went into his own room. It was the next room to yours; and the two had a door of communication between them. On entering his own room Mr. Godfrey (as he supposed) closed this door. His money-troubles kept him awake. He sat, in his dressing-gown and slippers, for nearly an hour, thinking over his position. Just as he was preparing to get into bed, he heard you, talking to yourself, in your own room, and going to the door of communication, found that he had not shut it as he supposed.

He looked into your room to see what was the

matter. He discovered you with the candle in your hand, just leaving your bedchamber. He heard you say to yourself, in a voice quite unlike your own voice, "How do I know? The Indians may be hidden in the house."

Up to that time, he had simply supposed himself (in giving you the laudanum) to be helping to make you the victim of a harmless practical joke. It now occurred to him, that the laudanum had taken some effect on you, which had not been foreseen by the doctor, any more than by himself. In the fear of an accident happening, he followed you softly to see what you would do.

He followed you to Miss Verinder's sitting-room, and saw you go in. You left the door open. He looked through the crevice thus produced, between the door and the post, before he ventured into the room himself.

In that position, he not only detected you in taking the Diamond out of the drawer—he also detected Miss Verinder, silently watching you from her bedroom, through her open door. He saw that *she* saw you take the Diamond, too.

Before you left the sitting-room again, you hesitated a little. Mr. Godfrey took advantage of this hesitation to get back again to his bedroom before you came out, and discovered him. He had

barely got back, before you got back too. You saw him (as he supposes) just as he was passing through the door of communication. At any rate, you called to him in a strange, drowsy voice.

He came back to you. You looked at him in a dull sleepy way. You put the Diamond into his hand. You said to him, "Take it back, Godfrey, to your father's bank. It's safe there—it's not safe here." You turned away unsteadily, and put on your dressing-gown. You sat down in the large arm-chair in your room. You said, "*I* can't take it back to the bank. My head's like lead—and I can't feel my feet under me." Your head sank on the back of the chair—you heaved a heavy sigh—and you fell asleep.

Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite went back, with the Diamond, into his own room. His statement is, that he came to no conclusion, at that time—except that he would wait, and see what happened in the morning.

When the morning came, your language and conduct showed that you were absolutely ignorant of what you had said and done overnight. At the same time, Miss Verinder's language and conduct showed that she was resolved to say nothing (in mercy to you) on her side. If Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite chose to keep the Diamond, he might do so with perfect

impunity. The Moonstone stood between him, and ruin. He put the Moonstone into his pocket.

V.

This was the story told by your cousin (under pressure of necessity) to Mr. Luker.

Mr. Luker believed the story to be, as to all main essentials, true—on this ground, that Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite was too great a fool to have invented it. Mr. Bruff and I agree with Mr. Luker, in considering this test of the truth of the story to be a perfectly reliable one.

The next question, was the question of what Mr. Luker would do in the matter of the Moonstone. He proposed the following terms, as the only terms on which he would consent to mix himself up with, what was (even in *his* line of business) a doubtful and dangerous transaction.

Mr. Luker would consent to lend Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite the sum of two thousand pounds, on condition that the Moonstone was to be deposited with him as a pledge. If, at the expiration of one year from that date, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite paid three thousand pounds to Mr. Luker, he was to receive back the Diamond, as a pledge redeemed. If he failed to produce the money at the expiration of the year, the pledge (otherwise the Moonstone) was

to be considered as forfeited to Mr. Luker—who would, in this latter case, generously make Mr. Godfrey a present of certain promissory notes of his (relating to former dealings) which were then in the money-lender's possession.

It is needless to say, that Mr. Godfrey indignantly refused to listen to these monstrous terms. Mr. Luker, thereupon, handed him back the Diamond, and wished him good night.

Your cousin went to the door, and came back again. How was he to be sure that the conversation of that evening, would be kept strictly secret between his friend and himself?

Mr. Luker didn't profess to know how. If Mr. Godfrey had accepted his terms, Mr. Godfrey would have made him an accomplice, and might have counted on his silence as on a certainty. As things were, Mr. Luker must be guided by his own interests. If awkward inquiries were made, how could he be expected to compromise himself, for the sake of a man who had declined to deal with him?

Receiving this reply, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite did, what all animals (human and otherwise) do, when they find themselves caught in a trap. He looked about him in a state of helpless despair. The day of the month, recorded on a neat little card in a box on the money-lender's chimney-piece, happened to attract his eye.

It was the twenty-third of June. On the twenty-fourth, he had three hundred pounds to pay to the young gentleman for whom he was trustee, and no chance of raising the money, except the chance that Mr. Luker had offered to him. But for this miserable obstacle, he might have taken the Diamond to Amsterdam, and have made a marketable commodity of it, by having it cut up into separate stones. As matters stood, he had no choice but to accept Mr. Luker's terms. After all, he had a year at his disposal, in which to raise the three thousand pounds—and a year is a long time.

Mr. Luker drew out the necessary documents on the spot. When they were signed, he gave Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite two cheques. One, dated June 23rd, for three hundred pounds. Another, dated a week on, for the remaining balance—seventeen hundred pounds.

How the Moonstone was trusted to the keeping of Mr. Luker's bankers, and how the Indians treated Mr. Luker and Mr. Godfrey (after that had been done) you know already.

The next event in your cousin's life, refers again to Miss Verinder. He proposed marriage to her for the second time—and (after having been accepted) he consented, at her request, to consider the marriage as broken off. One of his reasons for

making this concession has been penetrated by Mr. Bruff. Miss Verinder had only a life interest in her mother's property—and there was no raising the twenty thousand pounds on *that*.

But you will say, he might have saved the three thousand pounds, to redeem the pledged Diamond, if he had married. He might have done so cer-certainly—supposing neither his wife, nor her guardians and trustees, objected to his anticipating more than half of the income at his disposal, for some unknown purpose, in the first year of his marriage. But even if he got over this obstacle, there was another waiting for him in the back-ground. The lady at the Villa, had heard of his contemplated marriage. A superb woman, Mr. Blake, of the sort that are not to be trifled with—the sort with the light complexion and the Roman nose. She felt the utmost contempt for Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. It would be silent contempt, if he made a handsome provision for her. Other-wise, it would be contempt with a tongue to it. Miss Verinder's life interest allowed him no more hope of raising the "provision" than of raising the twenty thousand pounds. He couldn't marry—he really couldn't marry, under all the circumstances.

How he tried his luck again with another lady, and how *that* marriage also broke down on the

question of money, you know already. You also know of the legacy of five thousand pounds, left to him shortly afterwards, by one of those many admirers among the soft sex whose good graces this fascinating man had contrived to win. That legacy (as the event has proved) led him to his death.

I have ascertained that when he went abroad, on getting his five thousand pounds, he went to Amsterdam. There, he made all the necessary arrangements for having the Diamond cut into separate stones. He came back (in disguise), and redeemed the Moonstone, on the appointed day. A few days were allowed to elapse (as a precaution agreed to by both parties) before the jewel was actually taken out of the bank. If he had got safe with it to Amsterdam, there would have been just time between July 'forty-nine, and February 'fifty (when the young gentleman came of age) to cut the Diamond, and to make a marketable commodity (polished or unpolished) of the separate stones. Judge from this, what motives he had to run the risk which he actually ran. It was "neck or nothing" with him—if ever it was "neck or nothing" with a man yet.

I have only to remind you, before closing this Report, that there is a chance of laying hands

on the Indians, and of recovering the Moonstone yet. They are now (there is every reason to believe) on their passage to Bombay, in an East Indiaman. The ship (barring accidents) will touch at no other port on her way out; and the authorities at Bombay (already communicated with by letter, overland) will be prepared to board the vessel, the moment she enters the harbour.

I have the honour to remain, dear sir, your obedient servant, RICHARD CUFF (late sergeant in the Detective Force, Scotland Yard, London).*

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* NOTE.—Wherever the Report touches on the events of the birthday, or of the three days that followed it, compare with Betteredge's Narrative, chapters viii. to xiii.

SEVENTH NARRATIVE.

In a Letter from Mr. Candy.

BRIZINGHALL, Wednesday, September 26th, 1849.—Dear Mr. Franklin Blake, you will anticipate the sad news I have to tell you, on finding your letter to Ezra Jennings returned to you, unopened, in this enclosure. He died in my arms, at sunrise, on Wednesday last.

I am not to blame for having failed to warn you that his end was at hand. He expressly forbade me to write to you. "I am indebted to Mr. Franklin Blake," he said, "for having seen some happy days. Don't distress him, Mr. Candy—don't distress him."

His sufferings, up to the last six hours of his life, were terrible to see. In the intervals of remission, when his mind was clear, I entreated him to tell me of any relatives of his to whom I might write. He asked to be forgiven for refusing anything to

me. And then he said—not bitterly—that he would die as he had lived, forgotten and unknown. He maintained that resolution to the last. There is no hope now of making any discoveries concerning him. His story is a blank.

The day before he died, he told me where to find all his papers. I brought them to him on his bed. There was a little bundle of old letters which he put aside. There was his unfinished book. There was his Diary—in many locked volumes. He opened the volume for this year, and tore out, one by one, the pages relating to the time when you and he were together. "Give those," he said, "to Mr. Franklin Blake. In years to come, he may feel an interest in looking back at what is written there." Then he clasped his hands, and prayed God fervently to bless you, and those dear to you. He said he should like to see you again. But the next moment, he altered his mind. "No," he answered, when I offered to write. "I won't distress him! I won't distress him!"

At his request, I next collected the other papers —that is to say, the bundle of letters, the unfinished book, and the volumes of the Diary—and enclosed them all in one wrapper, sealed with my own seal. "Promise," he said "that you will put this into

my coffin with your own hand; and that you will see that no other hand touches it afterwards."

I gave him my promise. And the promise has been performed.

He asked me to do one other thing for him—which it cost me a hard struggle to comply with. He said, "Let my grave be forgotten. Give me your word of honour that you will allow no monument of any sort—not even the commonest tombstone—to mark the place of my burial. Let me sleep, nameless. Let me rest, unknown." When I tried to plead with him to alter his resolution, he became for the first, and only time, violently agitated. I could not bear to see it; and I gave way. Nothing but a little grass mound, marks the place of his rest. In time, the tombstones will rise round it. And the people who come after us will look, and wonder, at the nameless grave.

As I have told you, for six hours before his death his sufferings ceased. He dozed a little. I think he dreamed. Once or twice, he smiled. A woman's name, as I suppose—the name of "Ella"—was often on his lips at this time. A few minutes before the end came, he asked me to lift him on his pillow, to see the sun rise through the window. He was very weak. His head fell on my shoulder.

He whispered, "It's coming!" Then he said, "Kiss me!" I kissed his forehead. On a sudden, he lifted his head. The sunlight touched his face. A beautiful expression, an angelic expression, came over it. He cried out three times, "Peace! peace! peace!" His head sank back again on my shoulder, and the long trouble of his life was at an end.

So he has gone from us. This was, as I think, a great man—though the world never knew him. He bore a hard life bravely. He had the sweetest temper I have ever met with. The loss of him makes me feel very lonely. Perhaps I have never been quite myself again since my illness. Sometimes, I think of giving up my practice, and going away, and trying what some of the foreign baths and waters will do for me.

It is reported here, that you and Miss Verinder are to be married next month. Please to accept my best congratulations.

The pages of my poor friend's Journal are waiting for you at my house—sealed up, with your name on the wrapper. I was afraid to trust them to the post.

My best respects and good wishes attend Miss Verinder. I remain, dear Mr. Franklin Blake, truly yours, THOMAS CANDY.

EIGHTH NARRATIVE.

Contributed by Gabriel Betteredge.

I AM the person (as you remember, no doubt) who led the way in these pages, and opened the story. I am also the person who is left behind, as it were, to close the story up.

Let nobody suppose that I have any last words to say here, concerning the Indian Diamond. I hold that unlucky jewel in abhorrence—and I refer you to other authority than mine, for such news of the Moonstone as you may, at the present time, be expected to receive. My purpose, in this place, is to state a fact in the history of the family, which has been passed over by everybody, and which I won't allow to be disrespectfully smothered up in that way. The fact to which I allude is—the marriage of Miss Rachel and Mr. Franklin Blake. This interesting event took place at our house in Yorkshire, on Tuesday, October ninth, eighteen hundred and

forty-nine. I had a new suit of clothes on the occasion. And the married couple went to spend the honeymoon in Scotland.

Family festivals having been rare enough at our house, since my poor mistress's death, I own—on this occasion of the wedding—to having (towards the latter part of the day) taken a drop too much on the strength of it.

If you have ever done the same sort of thing yourself, you will understand and feel for me. If you have not, you will very likely say, "Disgusting old man! why does he tell us this?" The reason why is now to come.

Having, then, taken my drop (bless you! you have got your favourite vice, too; only your vice isn't mine, and mine isn't yours), I next applied the one infallible remedy—that remedy being, as you know, Robinson Crusoe. Where I opened that unrivalled book, I can't say. Where the lines of print at last left off running into each other, I know, however, perfectly well. It was at page three hundred and eighteen—a domestic bit concerning Robinson Crusoe's marriage, as follows:

"With those Thoughts, I considered my new Engagement, that I had a Wife"—(Observe! so had Mr. Franklin!)—"one Child born"—(Observe

again! that might yet be Mr. Franklin's case, too!) —"and my Wife then"—What Robinson Crusoe's wife did, or did not do, "then," I felt no desire to discover. I scored the bit about the Child with my pencil, and put a morsel of paper for a mark to keep the place: "Lie you there," I said, "till the marriage of Mr. Franklin and Miss Rachel is some months older—and then we'll see!"

The months passed (more than I had bargained for), and no occasion presented itself for disturbing that mark in the book. It was not till this present month of November, eighteen hundred and fifty, that Mr. Franklin came into my room, in high good spirits, and said, "Betteredge! I have got some news for you! Something is going to happen in the house, before we are many months older."

"Does it concern the family, sir?" I asked.

"It decidedly concerns the family," says Mr. Franklin.

"Has your good lady anything to do with it, if you please, sir?"

"She has a great deal to do with it," says Mr. Franklin, beginning to look a little surprised.

"You needn't say a word more, sir," I answered. "God bless you both! I'm heartily glad to hear it."

Mr. Franklin stared like a person thunderstruck.

"May I venture to inquire where you got your information?" he asked. "I only got mine (imparted in the strictest secresy) five minutes since."

Here was an opportunity of producing Robinson Crusoe! Here was a chance of reading that domestic bit about the child which I had marked on the day of Mr. Franklin's marriage! I read those miraculous words with an emphasis which did them justice, and then I looked him severely in the face. "*Now,* sir, do you believe in Robinson Crusoe?" I asked, with a solemnity suitable to the occasion.

"Betteredge!" says Mr. Franklin, with equal solemnity, "I'm convinced at last." He shook hands with me—and I felt that I had converted him.

With the relation of this extraordinary circumstance, my re-appearance in these pages comes to an end. Let nobody laugh at the unique anecdote here related. You are welcome to be as merry as you please over everything else I have written. But when I write of Robinson Crusoe, by the Lord it's serious—and I request you to take it accordingly!

When this is said, all is said. Ladies and gentlemen, I make my bow, and shut up the story.

EPILOGUE.

THE FINDING OF THE DIAMOND.

I.

THE STATEMENT OF SERGEANT CUFF'S MAN. (1849.)

ON the twenty-seventh of June last, I received instructions from Sergeant Cuff to follow three men; suspected of murder, and described as Indians. They had been seen on the Tower Wharf that morning, embarking on board the steamer bound for Rotterdam.

I left London by a steamer belonging to another company, which sailed on the morning of Thursday the twenty-eighth. Arriving at Rotterdam, I succeeded in finding the commander of the Wednesday's steamer. He informed me that the Indians had certainly been passengers on board his vessel—but as far as Gravesend only. Off that place, one of

the three had enquired at what time they would reach Calais. On being informed that the steamer was bound to Rotterdam, the spokesman of the party expressed the greatest surprise and distress at the mistake which he and his two friends had made. They were all willing (he said) to sacrifice their passage money, if the commander of the steamer would only put them ashore. Commiserating their position, as foreigners in a strange land, and knowing no reason for detaining them, the commander signalled for a shore boat, and the three men left the vessel.

This proceeding of the Indians having been plainly resolved on beforehand, as a means of preventing their being traced, I lost no time in returning to England. I left the steamer at Gravesend, and discovered that the Indians had gone from that place to London. Thence, I again traced them as having left for Plymouth. Inquiries made at Plymouth, proved that they had sailed, forty-eight hours previously, in the *Bewley Castle,* East Indiaman, bound direct to Bombay.

On receiving this intelligence, Sergeant Cuff caused the authorities at Bombay to be communicated with, overland—so that the vessel might be boarded by the police immediately on her entering the port. This step having been taken, my con-

nection with the matter came to an end. I have heard nothing more of it since that time.

II.

THE STATEMENT OF THE CAPTAIN. (1849.)

I AM requested by Sergeant Cuff to set in writing certain facts, concerning three men (believed to be Hindoos) who were passengers, last summer, in the ship *Bewley Castle*, bound for Bombay direct, under my command.

The Hindoos joined us at Plymouth. On the passage out, I heard no complaint of their conduct. They were berthed in the forward part of the vessel. I had but few occasions myself of personally noticing them.

In the latter part of the voyage, we had the misfortune to be becalmed for three days and nights, off the coast of India. I have not got the ship's journal to refer to, and I cannot now call to mind the latitude and longitude. As to our position, therefore, I am only able to state generally that the currents drifted us in towards the land, and that when the wind found us again, we reached our port in twenty-four hours afterwards.

The discipline of a ship (as all seafaring persons know) becomes relaxed in a long calm. The dis-

cipline of my ship became relaxed. Certain gentlemen among the passengers got some of the smaller boats lowered, and amused themselves by rowing about, and swimming, when the sun at evening time was cool enough to let them divert themselves in that way. The boats when done with, ought to have been slung up again in their places. Instead of this they were left moored to the ship's side. What with the heat, and what with the vexation of the weather, neither officers nor men seemed to be in heart for their duty while the calm lasted.

On the third night, nothing unusual was heard or seen by the watch on deck. When the morning came, the smallest of the boats was missing—and the three Hindoos were next reported to be missing too.

If these men had stolen the boat shortly after dark (which I have no doubt they did), we were near enough to the land to make it vain to send in pursuit of them, when the discovery was made in the morning. I have no doubt they got ashore, in that calm weather (making all due allowance for fatigue and clumsy rowing), before day-break.

On reaching our port, I there learnt, for the first time, the reason these passengers had for seizing their opportunity of escaping from the ship. I could only make the same statement to the authorities

which I have made here. They considered me to blame for allowing the discipline of the vessel to be relaxed. I have expressed my regret on this score to them, and to my owners. Since that time, nothing has been heard to my knowledge of the three Hindoos. I have no more to add to what is here written.

III.

THE STATEMENT OF MR. MURTHWAITE. (1850.)

(*In a Letter to Mr. Bruff.*)

HAVE you any recollection, my dear sir, of a semi-savage person whom you met out at dinner, in London, in the autumn of 'forty-eight? Permit me to remind you that the person's name was Murthwaite, and that you and he had a long conversation together after dinner. The talk related to an Indian Diamond, called the Moonstone, and to a conspiracy then in existence to get possession of the gem.

Since that time, I have been wandering in Central Asia. Thence I have drifted back to the scene of some of my past adventures in the north and north-west of India. About a fortnight since, I found myself in a certain district or province (but little known to Europeans) called Kattiawar.

Here an adventure befel me, in which (incredible as it may appear) you are personally interested.

In the wild regions of Kattiawar (and how wild they are, you will understand, when I tell you that even the husbandmen plough the land, armed to the teeth), the population is fanatically devoted to the old Hindoo religion—to the ancient worship of Bramah and Vishnu. The few Mahomedan families, thinly scattered about the villages in the interior, are afraid to taste meat of any kind. A Mahommedan even suspected of killing that sacred animal, the cow, is, as a matter of course, put to death without mercy in these parts by the pious Hindoo neighbours who surround him. To strengthen the religious enthusiasm of the people, two of the most famous shrines of Hindoo pilgrimage are contained within the boundaries of Kattiawar. One of them is Dwarka, the birthplace of the god Krishna. The other is the sacred city of Somnauth—sacked, and destroyed, as long since as the eleventh century, by the Mahomedan conqueror, Mahmoud of Ghizni.

Finding myself, for the second time, in these romantic regions, I resolved not to leave Kattiawar, without looking once more on the magnificent desolation of Somnauth. At the place where I planned to do this, I was (as nearly as I could

calculate it) some three days distant, journeying on foot, from the sacred city.

I had not been long on the road, before I noticed that other people—by twos and threes—appeared to be travelling in the same direction as myself.

To such of these as spoke to me, I gave myself out as a Hindoo-Boodhist, from a distant province, bound on a pilgrimage. It is needless to say that my dress was of the sort to carry out this description. Add, that I know the language as well as I know my own, and that I am lean enough and brown enough to make it no easy matter to detect my European origin—and you will understand that I passed muster with the people readily: not as one of themselves, but as a stranger from a distant part of their own country.

On the second day, the number of Hindoos travelling in my direction, had increased to fifties and hundreds. On the third day, the throng had swollen to thousands; all slowly converging to one point—the city of Somnauth.

A trifling service which I was able to render to one of my fellow-pilgrims, during the third day's journey, proved the means of introducing me to certain Hindoos of the higher caste. From these men I learnt that the multitude was on its way to a great religious ceremony, which was to take place

on a hill at a little distance from Somnauth. The ceremony was in honour of the god of the Moon; and it was to be held at night.

The crowd detained us as we drew near to the place of celebration. By the time we reached the hill, the moon was high in the heaven. My Hindoo friends possessed some special privileges which enabled them to gain access to the shrine. They kindly allowed me to accompany them. When we arrived at the place we found the shrine hidden from our view by a curtain hung between two magnificent trees. Beneath the trees, a flat projection of rock jutted out, and formed a species of natural platform. Below this, I stood, in company with my Hindoo friends.

Looking back down the hill, the view presented the grandest spectacle of Nature and Man, in combination, that I have ever seen. The lower slopes of the eminence melted imperceptibly into a grassy plain, the place of the meeting of three rivers. On one side, the graceful winding of the waters stretched away, now visible, now hidden by trees, as far as the eye could see. On the other, the waveless ocean slept in the calm of the night. People this lovely scene with tens of thousands of human creatures, all dressed in white, stretching down the sides of the hill, overflowing

into the plain, and fringing the nearer banks of the winding rivers. Light this halt of the pilgrims by the wild red flames of cressets and torches, streaming up at intervals from every part of the innumerable throng. Imagine the moonlight of the East, pouring in unclouded glory over all—and you will form some idea of the view that met me, when I looked forth from the summit of the hill.

A strain of plaintive music, played on stringed instruments and flutes, recalled my attention to the hidden shrine.

I turned, and saw on the rocky platform, the figures of three men. In the central figure of the three I recognised the man to whom I had spoken in England, when the Indians appeared on the terrace at Lady Verinder's house. The other two who had been his companions on that occasion, were no doubt his companions also on this.

One of the Hindoos, near whom I was standing, saw me start. In a whisper, he explained to me the apparition of the three figures on the platform of rock.

They were Brahmins (he said) who had forfeited their caste, in the service of the god. The god had commanded that their purification should be the purification by pilgrimage. On that night, the

three men were to part. In three separate directions, they were to set forth as pilgrims to the shrines of India. Never more were they to look on each other's faces. Never more were they to rest on their wanderings, from the day which witnessed their separation, to the day which witnessed their death.

As those words were whispered to me, the plaintive music ceased. The three men prostrated themselves on the rock, before the curtain which hid the shrine. They rose—they looked on one another—they embraced. Then they descended separately among the people. The people made way for them in dead silence. In three different directions, I saw the crowd part, at one and the same moment. Slowly the grand white mass of the people closed together again. The track of the doomed men through the ranks of their fellow mortals was obliterated. We saw them no more.

A new strain of music, loud and jubilant, rose from the hidden shrine. The crowd around me shuddered, and pressed together.

The curtain between the trees was drawn aside, and the shrine was disclosed to view.

There, raised high on a throne—seated on his typical antelope, with his four arms stretching towards the four corners of the earth—there soared above

us, dark and awful in the mystic light of heaven, the god of the Moon. And there, in the forehead of the deity, gleamed the yellow Diamond, whose splendour had last shone on me in England, from the bosom of a woman's dress!

Yes! after the lapse of eight centuries, the Moonstone looks forth once more, over the walls of the sacred city in which its story first began. How it has found its way back to its wild native land—by what accident, or by what crime, the Indians regained possession of their sacred gem, may be in your knowledge, but is not in mine. You have lost sight of it in England, and (if I know anything of this people) you have lost sight of it for ever.

So the years pass, and repeat each other; so the same events revolve in the cycles of time. What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone? Who can tell!

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